

THE **Sabbath Sentinel**

July–August 2005



*The U.S. Supreme Court
Cutting itself free from
the Anchor of Justice*

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

“...the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.”

The Sabbath Sentinel

July–August 2005 Volume 57, No. 4 Issue 514

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Our Cover: Thomas Jefferson: "You seem to consider the judges as the ultimate arbiters of all constitutional questions; a very dangerous doctrine indeed, and one which would place us under the despotism of an oligarchy...The Constitution has erected no such single tribunal...knowing that to whatever hands confided, with corruptions of time and party, its members would become despots" [Sept 28, 1820, letter from Thomas Jefferson to William Jarvis].

James Madison (primary author of the U.S. Constitution): "We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We've staked the future of all our political institutions upon our capacity...to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God" [1778 to the General Assembly of the State of Virginia].

John Adams, 2nd U.S. president: "The moment the idea is admitted into society that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commence."

(Photo Source: Niagara University)

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What Does God Want?



A few days ago a young woman that I know was talking to me about her journey as a Christian and how some of her ideas had changed over the years. She related how she thought she had progressed in some areas and failed in others. Overall, however, her report card showed improvement. During our conversation one thing that struck me was her sense of guilt regarding her inability to make some of the changes that she really wanted to see in herself. I suppose some of her guilt was due to her young age and impatience, but most of it was due to her tendency to evaluate her worth as a Christian based on a set of external standards. Of course, this type of thinking, which is very typical with Christians, leads to serious doubts about our self worth and even doubts about whether God really loves us.

Rules, Rules, Rules

When you think of your own personal growth in Christ, what do you base it on? In my nearly 40 years as a Christian I have seen many people fall by the wayside because of their inability to “live up to the standards” of Christian life—however those standards might be defined. This type of thinking is, unfortunately, pervasive in Sabbath-keeping churches. Nonetheless, Sunday-keeping churches have also been smitten by this sometimes fatal disease. Even though the Sabbath is not an issue for them (i.e., a ruler by which to measure ourselves and others), Sunday-keeping churches have a penchant for coming up with arbitrary sets of rules that constitute “Christian behavior.” This often depends on the denomination and the character of the local congregation. What I am saying is that there seems to be plenty of blame and guilt to go around, whether you keep the Sabbath or Sunday.

The issue for Sabbath keepers is a little different since we tend to scour the entire Bible for any hint of a rule that might be imposed on twenty-first-century Christian behavior. We generally start with Mount Sinai and work our way down to how to divide the mint and cumin. Sin, to us, is very black and white: “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). The problem, of course, comes in deciding how much of Old Testament law applies to the Christian. That is why we often cannot get along with other Sabbath keepers

and why there are so many Sabbath-keeping subgroups. Some say that those laws that display moral and spiritual values are all that need to be ported over from the Old Testament, where others contend (often contentiously) that we need to apply as many of the Old Testament laws as we possibly can because the more we obey, the closer to God we will be.

Does this strike anyone else as chaotic and dysfunctional as I think it is? Every bit of this leads to the belief that your worth as a Christian and your value to God are based on your ability to keep all of these Bible-based rules. It also leads to the belief that we will never be good enough to “do it all.” We will continue to fail and never live up to “the biblical standard.” No wonder people quit!

I want no one to misunderstand me. Obedience is essential for the Christian, but please understand this also: you will drive yourself and everyone around you crazy if you look at Christianity as just another (albeit superior) set of rules. Is this really what Jesus came and died for? Did he really pay the price for your sins so that you could continue to trudge through life burdened down by the weight of even more elaborate rules that you cannot possibly keep? What of Jesus’ statement: “Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden light.” Is the “easy” yoke of Christ what you have experienced as a Christian? If the burden of your Christian life is not “light,” you need to figure out why.

God’s Desire

Before we decide what our relationship with the Father and His Son should be (that is, what makes us “good” Christians), it would be good to look at what God wants our relationship with Him to look like. If we are driven to seek fulfillment in our relationship with God in any way other than the way He wants, we are wasting our time.

In speaking to the prophet Jeremiah, God lamented the punishment being inflicted on Judah and Jerusalem. It truly grieved His heart. This is what the Lord said to the prophet: “Thus says the LORD: ‘Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man

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The Marriage Ceremony

by Richard C. Nickels

Note: I was thrilled when my youngest daughter Amanda asked me to perform her wedding ceremony, at the same place where 33 years ago, Shirley and I were married. I was pretty nervous back then, but this time I was all smiles! Here is the text of the marriage ceremony I performed on June 19, 2005.— Richard C. Nickels



Shirley and Richard Nickels

My Daughter's Marriage Ceremony

We are here today to celebrate the marriage of Mark Allen Byrd and Amanda Ruth Nickels. We want to encourage them as they begin a new life together. We want to ask God to bind and bless them as they become one flesh. As parents, relatives, and friends, we offer our unconditional support that this marriage, unlike so many others today, will be "as long as they both shall live," and filled with all the happiness and joy that the Almighty God intends them to have.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.... And God said, Let us make man in our image,



after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth.... So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.... And God saw every thing that He had made, and behold, it was very good.... And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet [fitting] for him." Genesis 1:1, 26-28, 31, 2:18.

"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh," Genesis 2:23-24.

Yes, the Creator God made the marriage relationship between a man a woman, and it is very good. God created marriage for a man and a woman. The exclusive sexual relationship within a godly marriage is good. "Marriage," the Apostle Paul said, "is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled ..." Hebrews 13:4.

Our Savior, Jesus Christ, is a strong advocate for lifelong, faithful marriages. "Have ye not read," He said, "that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female ...For this cause shall a man cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder," Matthew 19:4-6. Marriage is for life. This marriage is for keeps.

The role of a godly husband and godly wife is a glorious thing. I urge you both, Mark and Amanda, to strive to attain to the highest possible fulfillment of your roles as husband and wife.

Proverbs 31 describes the ideal virtuous woman. Indirectly, it also describes a godly man, because behind every man of God is a virtuous woman. "Who can

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Evolution vs. Intelligent Design

Scientific evidence that God is in the details

by Richard A. Wiedenheft

The theory of evolution by natural selection has dominated the scientific world for almost a century and a half. And while most evangelical Christians have always disparaged and dismissed the theory, their arguments have done little to loosen its grip on the thinking of most scientists, educators, and millions of their students.

But now evolution is being challenged on a new front by scientists themselves--not necessarily Christians--who are part of what is called the Intelligent Design (ID) movement. They claim that evolution simply cannot explain the incredible complexity and exquisite pattern so apparent in the natural world. On the contrary, these could only be the result of intelligent design.

The roots of this movement can perhaps be traced back to a book written in 1984 by three scientists. These men challenged the validity of experiments that supposedly demonstrated that life could have arisen by chance from some primordial soup. Near the end of their book they write:

A major conclusion to be drawn from this work is that the undirected flow of energy through a primordial atmosphere and ocean is at present a woefully inadequate explanation for the incredible complexity associated with even simple living systems, and is probably wrong.¹

In his 1996 book *Darwin's Black Box*, Michael Behe, professor of biochemistry at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, puts it this way:

The simplicity that was once expected to be the foundation of life has proven to be a phantom; instead, systems of horrendous, irreducible complexity inhabit the cell. The resulting realization that life was designed by an intelligence is a shock to us in the twentieth century who have gotten used to thinking of life as the result of simple natural laws.²

Irreducible complexity

One of the cornerstones of Behe's arguments is the concept of irreducible complexity. A system or a mechanism can be reduced to a point beyond which it becomes a pile of junk. He uses the example of a mousetrap: It is so designed that removing any one of its five essential parts renders it utterly useless for catching mice. Either all the parts are present, properly connected, and functioning, or the mousetrap doesn't work.

I like to illustrate this principle with a car. It's full of devices and decorations that aren't essential for transportation. The radio, the windows, and the chrome bumpers could theoretically have been added over a long time by gradual improvements and changes to a functioning car. But remove one of the four wheels or the steering wheel or the flywheel, and you've got an expensive pile of junk that won't go anywhere.

All the essential parts of an automobile have to be in place and operating together at the same time, or it won't function at all as a means of transport. You can't have a partially evolved automobile that limps along somehow without any steering control mechanism until some evolutionary process just happens to create a steering wheel that just happens to be capable of transferring its rotation to moveable wheels on the ground!

Geoffrey Simmons, M.D., calls this "all-or-none," or the "whole-package phenomenon (WPP)."³ The whole package has to be in place, or nothing gets accomplished.

The living world is full of "whole packages"--intricate yet irreducibly complex mechanisms and processes. These present a huge problem for the theory of evolution, which posits that complex forms of life can develop step by step from simpler forms, gradually adding functionality as they become more and more complicated. As Behe says:

An irreducibly complex system cannot be produced directly... by slight, successive modifications of a precursor system, because any precursor to an irreducibly complex system that is missing a part is by definition nonfunctional.⁴

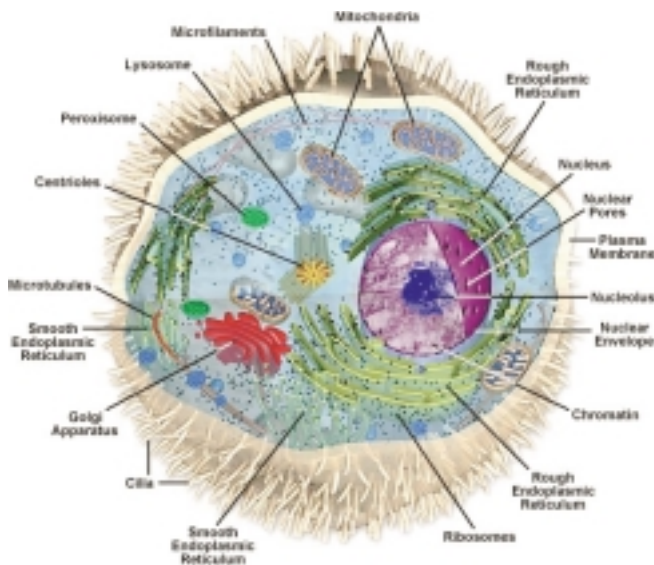
Even Charles Darwin recognized this "Achilles' heel" of his theory. Behe quotes from *The Origin of the Species*: "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down."⁵

In Darwin's day, however, scientists were just beginning to recognize that living organisms were made of cells, which they understood little about. The cell was an unknown or, as Behe terms it, a "black box." The presumption was that once they came to understand the cell, scientists would find simple structures and processes that would support the theory of evolution.

“Simple” cells

When I studied biology in high school and college in the 1960s, teachers talked of simple cells and simple one-celled animals. The thinking was that amino acids somehow developed into uncomplicated functioning cells, which eventually adapted to their environment to become more complicated cells, which developed into multi-cellular plants and animals—and on and on until all the life forms as we know them today were developed. So the theory went.

However, with the advent of the electron microscope in the mid-twentieth century, scientists could begin to open the “black box” of the cell. Around the same time, X-ray crystallography enabled researchers to determine the structure of various molecules, in-



Irreducible Complexity

This “simple” animal cell is an illustration of irreducible complexity. (Source: Florida State University)

cluding complex protein molecules. These advances revealed far more complexity than anyone had ever imagined. The simplest of cells is anything but simple.

Geoffrey Simmons estimates that every cell contains one billion compounds including five million different kinds of proteins, each one having a unique shape and characteristics that enable it to play a specific role in the body. In addition, there are more than 3,000 enzymes critical to chemical reactions that take place in the body. Cells come in many varieties and shapes; they serve many different and specialized functions in the body. Some cells work as individuals floating in the blood; others connect with identical cells to form skin or muscles, for example. Still others send out long extensions to communicate with other cells.⁶

When one looks into the workings of any one cell, he finds incredible complexity.

The “simplest” self-sufficient, replicating cell has the capacity to produce thousands of different proteins and other molecules, at different times and under variable conditions. Synthesis, degradation, energy generation, replication, maintenance of cell architecture, mobility, regulation, repair, communication—all of these functions take place in virtually every cell, and each function itself requires the interaction of numerous parts.⁷

Behe likens all this activity, accomplished at the molecular level, to the workings of machinery:

... life is based on machines—machines made of molecules! Molecular machines haul cargo from one place in the cell to another along “highways” made of other molecules, while still others act as cables, ropes, and pulleys to hold the cell in shape. Machines turn cellular switches on and off, sometimes killing the cell or causing it to grow. Solar-powered machines capture the energy of photons and store it in chemicals. Electrical machines allow current to flow through nerves. Manufacturing machines build other molecular machines, as well as themselves. Cells swim using machines, copy themselves with machinery, ingest food with machinery. In short, highly sophisticated molecular machines control every cellular process. Thus the details of life are finely calibrated, and the machinery of life enormously complex.⁸

In other words, the simplest cell is a veritable factory of molecular machines, and evolution offers no mechanism whereby this factory could have gradually assembled itself over long periods of time.

Conceptual precursors are not physical precursors

Behe faults evolutionists for failing to look at the details when they postulate how, for example, a single-celled animal with a light-sensitive spot could, over a very long time, develop into an eye. The light-sensitive spot might be a conceptual precursor to an eye, but when one looks at all the chemical systems in the eye, there is no way the light-sensitive spot could be a physical precursor to the eye.

As an illustration, consider the bicycle as a conceptual precursor to a simple motorized bike. One could postulate that somehow the bicycle gradually developed into a motor bike. But looking deeper, one discovers that this progression simply cannot happen gradually. The motor, for example, is an entire irreducibly complex system consisting of hundreds of parts. If any one part is missing (a spark plug, for example), the motor is useless. And even if the motor were somehow available in an evolutionary junkyard, it would have to be securely mounted on the frame, and somehow transfer its energy to a drive sprocket, which would somehow get connected to a wheel sprocket in order to make a wheel turn. Then there’s

the problem of fuel, carburetion, and a starting mechanism. Without all the parts fully assembled, the motor bike won't function at all. Gradually adding some parts without the others results in a more cumbersome conveyance that is less functional than the original bicycle.

The bicycle may help us to conceive of, to conceptualize, a motor bike, but it cannot be a physical precursor to a motor bike. Similarly, the light-sensitive spot may be a conceptual precursor to an eye, but it would have to add many complex functions and biochemical processes, each of them irreducibly complex, in order to function as an eye. Evolution is based on the assumption of physical precursors. But the natural world offers irreducibly complex systems that function only as a whole and that could have come about only by Intelligent Design.

An example: cilia

For us non-biochemists, the details of how the body functions at the molecular level can be hard to grasp. But it is in the details that evolution faces its greatest challenges, and it is in the details that we can see the marvel of a creation that cries out for intelligent design.

One example of an irreducibly complex system, detailed by Behe, is cilia—cells with hair-like extensions that can move like a whip. The respiratory tract is lined with cilia, helping expel mucus. Sperm cells are mobile and have cilia to swim. These apparently simple cells are actually complex molecular machines.

If you cut through a cilium and examine its cross section under great magnification, you discover that it is composed of a number of tiny tubes, or microtubules. Just inside the "skin" of the cilium is a circle of nine pairs of these tiny tubes. In the middle of the cilium is yet another set of two microtubules linked to each other. All the microtubules are, in fact, cylinders made up by a circle of even smaller strands or fibers.

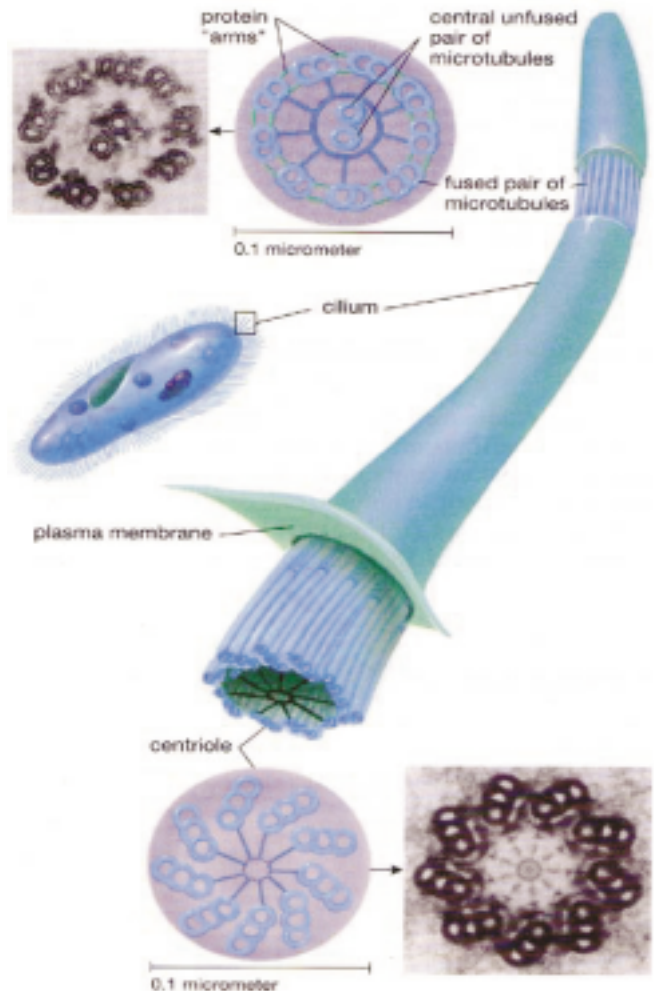
The current understanding of biochemists is that the motion of the cilium depends on two protein molecules that go between a microtubule of one pair and one of the microtubules of the pair next to it. One of these proteins is dynein, the "motor" of the cilium. The other is nexin, which serves as a link or tie between the adjacent pairs.

Under the right circumstances, the dynein pushes against the molecules in the microtubule next to it so that the two tend to slide past one another. In fact, if the microtubule pairs weren't tied together by the nexin, the dynein molecules would just keep pushing the adjacent tubule along like a telescoping antenna until they reached the end. But the nexin connectors prevent that from happening. With the dynein pushing and the nexin holding, the microtubules bend. This action of all the dynein motors pushing over and over

again and all the nexin linkers holding on tight is apparently what makes cilia whip and the cell move.

This is a simplified explanation of an intricate mechanism, one that, according to Behe, is irreducibly complex.

All of these parts are required to perform one function: ciliary motion. Just as a mousetrap does not work unless all of its constituent parts are present, ciliary



Anatomy of a Cilium

With whip-like action, cilia move cells and other substances throughout the body. (Source: Florida State University)

motion simply does not exist in the absence of microtubules, connectors, and motors. Therefore we can conclude that the cilium is irreducibly complex—an enormous monkey wrench thrown into its presumed gradual, Darwinian evolution.⁹

The Clotting of Blood

When you get cut, your life depends on the ability of your blood to quickly form a clot before all your blood drains out. Just as important, it has to stop clotting when the bleeding is stopped, and it has to not clot when there's no wound! That seems like a relatively simple assignment, but it is not. On the contrary,

the body's mechanism for controlling blood clotting is a marvelous and intricate series of chemical reactions that is irreducibly complex. Remove any one of the elements, and blood clotting simply doesn't work.

Fibrogen is the protein that is used to make up the web, or mesh, of "fibers" that plays a vital role in clot formation. Normally, it just floats around in the blood. In order for it to get involved in clotting, fibrogen has to be altered by another protein, thrombin, which lops off small pieces of the fibrogen molecule to expose "sticky patches." This new molecule is called fibrin. Its sticky patches fit into portions of other fibrin molecules so they begin to form long strands that cross over one another to form a web that traps blood cells.

But what keeps the thrombin from lopping off the ends of the fibrogen molecule all the time creating one massive blood clot? The answer is that thrombin molecules float around in the bloodstream in an inactive form called prothrombin. It takes another protein, called Stuart's Factor, to activate prothrombin. But what keeps Stuart's Factor from activating prothrombin all the time? That involves yet another protein molecule, accelerin, which exists in an inactive form until it is activated by—well, you get the picture!

In all, there are some twenty chemicals involved in the cascade of reactions that quickly swings into action when the body is wounded. The clotting mechanism first forms a soft clot to stop the flow of blood. Then it turns off the clotting process, then converts the fragile soft clot into a hard one that is more durable. Finally, when the wound is healed, it breaks up the clot. All the chemicals involved are essential to the process. If any one is missing, the entire process fails to work. Hemophiliacs, for example, can't stop bleeding because their blood lacks one of these essential factors.

Referring to the effort of one scientist to explain how this blood clotting cascade could have evolved gradually, Behe wrote:

The fact is, no one on earth has the vaguest idea how the coagulation cascade came to be.... Blood coagulation is a paradigm of the staggering complexity that underlies even apparently simple bodily processes. Faced with such complexity beneath even simple phenomena, Darwinian theory falls silent."¹⁰

Other examples of complexity

Behe details other examples of irreducibly complex systems in the body, including the seemingly simple task of moving proteins created in one part of a cell to another part of the cell where they are needed. One method, which he calls a "mind-boggling process," is vesicular transport

... where protein cargo is loaded into containers for shipment [from one part of the cell to another].... An analysis shows that vesicular transport is irreducibly complex, and so its development staunchly

resists gradualistic explanations, as Darwinian evolution would have it.¹¹

Simmons cites insulin production as a process that is irreducibly complex as well:

In the process of insulin manufacture, none of the several "pre-insulin" molecules are useful (envision a car being made along an assembly line). Not only is this an all-or-none process, but so are the mechanisms that tell the body when to secrete insulin, how much insulin to produce or secrete, for how long, where to send it, how to link it to nutrients in the blood, how to transport it, and how to turn it off when the job is done.¹²

Then, there's the body's immune system and the manufacture of AMP, a form of one of the four building blocks used to make up DNA. These are all very complicated, yet irreducible; and evolutionists offer no explanation as to how they came about.

What does it all mean?

In his conclusion, Behe writes about the implications of all the knowledge about cell structure and function that has been accumulated over the past four decades.

The result of these cumulative efforts to investigate the cell—to investigate life at the molecular level—is a loud, clear, piercing cry of "design!" The result is so unambiguous and so significant that it must be ranked as one of the greatest achievements in the history of science.... The observation of the intelligent design of life is as momentous as the observation that the earth goes around the sun or that disease is caused by bacteria or that radiation is emitted in quanta.... But no bottles have been uncorked, no hands slapped [to celebrate this discovery]. Instead, a curious, embarrassed silence surrounds the stark complexity of the cell.... Why does the scientific community not greedily embrace its startling discovery? ... The dilemma is that while one side of the elephant is labeled intelligent design, the other side might be labeled God.¹³

Behe finds this rather odd given the fact that 90 percent of Americans say they believe in God and about 50 percent attend religious services every week and that you regularly hear references to God from politicians and sports stars.

But the apostle Paul would certainly not have been surprised. He wrote almost 2,000 years ago of those who "did not like to retain God in their knowledge" (Romans 1:28). And while the intelligent design movement is a serious challenge to evolution, I don't think we should be optimistic that Darwin's theory will collapse anytime soon, nor that large numbers of scientists will embrace God as the Intelligent Designer. The mainstream of society didn't pay much attention to God before Darwin, and I doubt it will pay much attention after his theory is relegated to the footnotes of the history of science.

On the other hand, Christians can have greater confidence that our belief in God is not based on a blind faith that is in conflict with science. On the contrary, we can glorify God with the psalmist: "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Psalm 139:14, NIV). With every advance of science in understanding the intricate design of the creation, we know more and more "full well" how wonderful the Creator is.

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse (Romans 1:20).

The more we learn of the exquisite, fantastic design of the creation, the more clearly we can see the magnitude of the Creator's eternal power and majesty!

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Richard A. Wiedenheft and his wife, Darlene, live in Falls, PA.

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"We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin. I have heard others, and I have heard myself, recounting cruelties and falsehoods committed in boyhood as if they were not the concern of the present speakers, and even with laughter. But mere time does nothing either to the fact or to the guilt of a sin. The guilt is washed out not by time but by repentance and the blood of Christ." —C. S. Lewis

Sabbath Morning Companion

The Two Thieves

We don't know their crimes, but we can presume they were terrible in Rome's eyes. They were suffering the ultimate fate: an excruciating, slow death nailed to a wooden tool of torture. One was crucified to the right and one to the left of Jesus, and along with the taunting rabble around them, they mocked the dying Christ and challenged him to come down (Matthew 27:39-44).

But one of these malefactors had a change of heart. As the afternoon wore on and the torture increased, he began to recognize the majesty of the One who was crucified along side him. "Jesus," he said, "remember me when you come into your kingdom" (Luke 23:42).

Now here is a marvelous thing. A man dying with him, who once reviled him, coming to understand that Jesus was going to have a kingdom. Even after three and one half years of working together, the Twelve neither believed nor understood this, for they all fled at the critical moment. Yet the dying thief could look at the just man next to him and went to him in faith.

And, unlike the disciples, he did not ask for a position on his right hand or left (which is where these thieves were as they spoke), but only that the Lord would "remember" him.

Too often as we read this story we argue over the placement of a comma or what is really meant by "paradise". By doing so, we lose the touching moment that it was.

Hebrews tells us that Jesus was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin (Hebrews 4:14-16). We're told that he can understand the feelings of our infirmities. It is no stretch to say that Jesus at his hour of greatest need was discouraged. A friend had betrayed him. The disciples had all fled. The mob around him was mocking and cursing. Demons tormented him on every side. He was suffering an excruciating death.

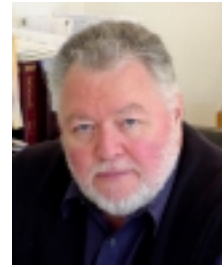
Yes, Jesus was discouraged. But out of this pandemonium came the humble voice of a dying thief whose words ring down to us two thousand years hence: "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." In his hour of greatest need, he received encouragement and affirmation from a dying man.

—Lenny Cacchio

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Stingy Christians and a Generous God

by Kenneth Westby



If you can describe yourself as a generous Christian—evidenced by your acts of generosity toward God and man—feel free to skip this article.

The Rabbi called on a member of his congregation for a pledge to enlarge the synagogue's sanctuary. "Sam, our congregation is growing larger every year and we really need this addition. Could you pledge a hundred dollars?"

"No, Rabbi, I can't."

"Well, then, how about fifty?"

"I can't do it, Rabbi, I'm heavily in debt, and I've got to pay my creditors first."

"But Sam, you owe a great debt to God, too, and don't you think He deserves your generous response?"

"He sure does, Rabbi, but God isn't crowding me like my other creditors."

In life it seems we are continually being "crowded" for our money by people as well as by our own needs, desires, and appetites. Money is a big deal in life which is why it was a frequent topic in Christ's ministry.

In the short space of the Gospels, Jesus preached at least thirty-one sermons on money or giving! Today, he would probably be accused of harping too much about money.

Most of us preachers don't have the courage of Christ. The truth is, preachers are afraid to speak boldly about money and giving for fear of being criticized. The scandal of money-hustling TV preachers, and of self-serving celebrity clergy have poisoned the waters of Christian giving. The result has been that dedicated ministers and Christian workers, sincerely serving worthy causes and ministries, have become too timid to bring up the subject of money lest they be identified with the money-grubbers and frauds. But such timidity is also cowardly and serves neither God nor his church.

I risk criticism by bring up the "M" word and suggesting some Christians are stingy. Well, criticize away, but please honestly consider the scriptural substance of this article. The "seed" of this message on giving

may fall on stony ground, but the job of the sower is to sow, not to be popular.

The Strongest Scripture on Giving

It is not harping on money to simply follow the text of Scripture and make an honest effort to apply its principles to daily living. Let's begin with the Greatest and First Commandment which reads,

Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deut 6:5, Jesus adds *mind* when he repeated it in Mk 12:30)

The gathering of terms—heart, soul, mind, strength—indicate the totality of our commitment toward God. We are to love God with our whole selves—everything that we are and everything we have within our power.

Rabbinical scholars note that the word "strength" includes more than how big your muscles are or your energy level. They suggest the primary meaning of "strength" has to do with loving and serving God with "all thy possessions."¹

We are attached to our possessions and are rarely separated from them until that last breath when we leave every dollar and everything else behind. We acquire our possessions with money earned by the sweat of our brow—by dedicating our time to a job. Our life is time and we have invested some of that life to gain whatever possessions and wealth we presently have. There is nothing wrong with being rich, or with owning and enjoying material things, except when we have a stronger attachment to them than we have to God and the things of God. (God is rich and loves to abundantly bless his people as evidenced by the millionaires of Genesis—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.)²

Remember when the rich young man came to Jesus expressing his willingness to do any good thing to attain eternal life? How did Jesus test the fellow's commitment? He asked him to love God above his possessions: Donate them to the needy, join the disciples, and follow His Son.

In spite of his religious testimony that he was sincerely obeying God and chasing after eternal life, he

was, in fact, unwilling to love God with all his strength/possessions. He rejected Jesus' offer and walked away depressed. Matthew notes the reason why he wouldn't give, "he had great possessions,"³ and was obviously too attached to them. Was he a hypocrite? Stingy? Stupid? Maybe all three? Jesus wasn't fooled by his religious face and boast. True disciples/Christians must be willing to put God first—in everything.⁴

But before we get too hard on that fellow, we had best take a private look in our own mirror.

Excuses by the Trainload

After 42 years of pastoral work I have probably heard every excuse for not giving (or giving precious little) either by tithing or generous freewill offerings. They run from the obvious, to the creative, to the bizarre: "I can't afford it—too many bills," "I'm on a fixed income," "I've got a large family," "I pay too much in taxes," "I donate to charity through work and through the union," "churches get plenty of money and they don't need mine," "most preachers are crooks," "I don't belong to a church and I don't know any people in need," "I tithe to myself since every believer is a minister and priest," "I don't believe God expects me to give," "I give in non-monetary ways," "I can't give but I pray," "my husband won't let me," "my wife would object," "if I made more money or were rich I'd be very generous," "when I find a worthy church or cause I'll give, but haven't found one yet," etc.

One of the more popular excuses against a committed and generous program of Christian giving is: Tithing is no longer required. This frequent argument serves to excuse the Stingy Christian against any robust or generous giving program. I might agree with that statement, but does that mean that it is somehow wrong or "legalistic" to give ten percent of one's income by one's own freewill? Was the ten percent tithe, as presented in Scripture, the minimum or maximum amount one was to give? Is tithing the most powerful of God's principles on giving? What do you think?

What is the motive behind the loud chorus against tithing? Are these attackers noble liberators freeing people from doctrinal error and cutting off corrupt preachers from their support? Maybe. My experience with many anti-tithe crusaders reveals, instead of noble motives, a quest for personal justification of their selfish behaviors. They don't tithe and they aren't generous toward God. In fact many are hostile to churches in general and ministers in particular. We need to ask, are the tithers we know being forced to give against their will? (In the spirit of full disclosure I should disclose my personal belief: I don't believe tithing is binding upon Christians, nor do I believe churches should intimidate or require members to tithe. However, tith-

ing, which is proportional giving, is one of many good examples of Godly giving principles. During our forty-one years of marriage, fifteen of which we believed tithing was required, my wife and I have always donated much more than a tithe. Read on for other biblical principles of Christian generosity.)

Years ago I remember when thousands of Christians who had been regular tithers (believing it was commanded), left their church organization, and after their study of Scripture, concluded that tithing was no longer binding upon them. The reactions that followed were varied and revealed in each person how much of the nature of God he or she had internalized.

Some breathed a sigh of relief and said that since they did "have to" tithe they weren't going to. They just got a ten percent raise and rejoiced they now had more to spend on themselves. For years following their departure from their old church organization they continued to complain about how they had been ripped off by a lousy church and never again would they part with their money for ministry, church, evangelism—anything religious. They could frequently drag up the "I've been burned in the past" excuse for being stingy with God and keeping everything for themselves. I wonder how their sad story sits with God. Does he give them a pass on developing a generous spirit toward supporting the Gospel because they, by their own decision, had belonged to an error-filled organization that misused some of their tithe money?

Others acknowledged a Christian responsibility to at least give something to the Cause of Christ, but felt they had paid their big dues in the past church regime and from here on out it was going to be nickel and dime giving. No commitments, no proportional giving, just a little here and there as the "spirit moved" or if a touch of guilt motivated them. In effect, they retired from an active support of any church or ministry. Perhaps they figured the money they had donated in the past, when they were required to do so, had amassed a sufficient treasure in heaven to tide them over.

Still others regarded their past tithing (in some cases hyper-tithing) as "given to God" regardless of the human failings of the people receiving the tithes. They had dedicated those funds as holy offerings to God and carried over no regrets even though they now no longer regarded tithing a legal requirement. They continued to be generous in their giving and continued to regard their freewill offerings "holy unto God."

We express ourselves with our money and these different reactions above reveal a level of spiritual maturity—or the lack of it. God is not fooled by our "victim stories," he just looks at our actions, our generous giving, and can see for himself if we love him with all our "strength" and with all we possess.

Some Giving Principles

God is a generous God and loves to fill our cups of blessing to overflowing. He also wants us to become like him and possess this virtue. This virtue, of course, is manifested in many ways beyond monetary giving. God wants us to be generous with our talents and abilities, generous with our time, generous in sharing our learning, generous in our encouragement and praise, and generous in our hospitality. But Scripture is clear; giving of our resources is one of the most important examples of the virtue of generosity. Let's just look at just a few principles of Godly giving.

1) Giving as God has prospered us. In giving, the source is "as God has prospered him,"⁵ as Paul expresses it. This means giving is to be in proportion to what a person earns, not necessarily what a church or some needy person requests. This principle requires one to measure the level of prosperity he has enjoyed (income), and respond in kind by determining a suitable amount to give.

2) Give according to the need. Needs do matter. This principle deals with giving to meet a particular need as was the case when the church first began and thousands of pilgrims had to be fed and sheltered. Drastic needs required drastic measures and the Brethren were selling whatever they could lay their hands on to support these needy Christians caught far away from their homelands.⁶ This principle could trump the "as you've been prospered" principle given the emergency circumstances.

In fact the first deaths in the new church were at the hands of God who struck down two people who, in the face of this crisis in the new church, were pretending to be more generous than they really were.⁷ Others may not have known this married couple were lying, but God did and revealed their lie thus making the point for all time that we can't fool God about how generous we are—or aren't. Some of the most terrible punishments God has meted out were upon the covetous.⁸ Paul said, "covetousness is idolatry."⁹ Covetous people are usually stingy. How we handle our money matters with God.

3) "Giving as you have been blessed" is the principle behind most of the offerings recorded in Scripture, whether by temple sacrifice, love offerings, thank offerings, or praise offerings. This giving principle is totally subjective. One must count his blessings one by one letting his heart overflow with gratitude toward God and then express that love with generous offerings in His Name.

What kind of blessings would one consider? Not just your bank account or net worth, although they would be part of the picture. When consid-

ering my spiritual blessings I must take inventory of what God has so generously and kindly given me. I would think of His calling, His forgiveness, the knowledge of Him, His plan, His way of life, His patience, and His Mercy—the list would continue and be long.

And what about the many blessings in my personal life? I must savor the blessings of my wonderful wife, my marvelous children and grandchildren, my terrific friends, challenging experiences and opportunities, living in America, my comfortable home and car, my blessings of good food and health, my many deliverances from troubles—and this list would also be long. A heart filled with gratitude toward God cannot hold back from expressing itself with generosity toward God and man.

4) The blessing in the act of giving. Jesus offers another principle of giving that is mentioned only by Paul in one of those rare red letter quotes in the book of Acts: "It is more blessed to give than to receive."¹⁰

Is Jesus saying that *giving* produces a greater blessing than the blessing of *receiving* blessings? I think so. Would these greater blessings be realized personally through the profound psychological pleasure of helping or blessing someone or some ministry with our gift? Absolutely. Haven't you experienced that special joy that comes from giving? It can be a giddy thrill to see someone or some good work blessed by your hand. Can you agree with Jesus that the goodness of this fruit is even sweeter than being on the receiving end of a gift, which is sweet indeed? Giving must give God great pleasure.

If our giving itself yields a personal pleasure, do we also receive a spiritual blessing from God? I think so. Giving is part of God's nature and when we practice it from the heart we reap his spiritual blessings. What form those blessings might take are known only to God, but he who sees in secret will manifest his blessing upon you openly in some way at some time where it will have its greatest impact.¹¹

These dual effects of giving remind me of the old saw about cutting wood: it produces heat two ways; you get warm when you chop the tree down and split up its wood, and you get warm when you burn it in the stove. Giving is similar. You bless the recipients—whether the needy or a ministry of Christ—and you yourself are blessed by God both *personally*, because you gave with a happy heart, and *spiritually*, because your generous spirit pleases him.

Giving is an Act of Worship

The job of the ministry is not to nag people to give. Nobody likes to be nagged. It causes one's defenses to go up against a perceived attempt to pry open a tightly

clutched wallet. True Christianity is a heart religion and giving must be a willing act of the heart as part of one's total commitment to love God. It is futile to talk about the needs of the church to a person with little or no spiritual commitment to God.

Getting a heart for God and the things of God is where any discussion about giving should begin. The most memorized verse in the Bible begins, "For God so loved the world that he gave..."¹² Accepting this precious gift from God means acknowledging insufficiency—"I have a need." It is not easy to do—hard, in fact—but it is the essence of the conversion experience. Accepting gifts from God must prompt a reaction on our part. It is "the goodness of God" that leads us to repentance.¹³

God gives his Son, offers forgiveness of sins and eternal life and what does he expect of us? He expects a response from us that is not a casual or partial commitment to Him. He expects a total commitment; all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Anything less will not be worthy.

Repentance means we have committed to become a new man in the image of Christ; we have dedicated ourselves to taking on the divine nature and to making the things of God most important in our lives. We see ourselves, our things, and our money in a new light—no longer our own, but belonging to our God and Savior.

With humble eyes God's Spirit helps us see reality for what it is; God owns everything and has for a short spell entrusted to us some of what he owns. "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it."¹⁴ Doesn't that include you and me and all our material things that have come forth from his earth?

The sinful woman described in Luke 7 expressed her love for Jesus in a most earnest way by wetting his feet with her tears, kissing them, and wiping them with her hair. Jesus said, "Her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."¹⁵ Have God and his Son done enough for us to "love much"? Should not our actions of gratitude express it?

Holding a coin, Jesus said we are to "render to God what is God's."¹⁶ How does one do that? Has anyone successfully sent a tithe or offering up to God's heavenly throne? Does the US Postal Service deliver there? Can we say God "needs" our money in any tangible way? Does God have bills to pay? Of course not. All giving to God stays on earth and is to be directed toward those dedicated to upholding his name and proclaiming his Word (the priesthood and temple ministry in the OT; the work of the Church in the NT), and to those among us in need.

Yet, in one sense our giving does reach heaven. To the Gentile soldier Cornelius God's angel declared,

"Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God."¹⁷ Jesus said that by the righteous use of earthly treasure you can "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven...for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."¹⁸

On one occasion Jesus planted himself next to the temple offering box to observe carefully how and how much people donated and then offered his commentary. He singled out a poor widow woman for particular praise. He noted that she gave much more proportionally than all the others.¹⁹ Apparently even the poor can be generous toward God. It should be noted that Jesus praised this woman's giving even though she offered it to a far from perfect priesthood (some would call it corrupt) and temple administration. Jesus and the woman both regarded her gift as given to God.

Christianity is a heart religion and one's treasure should be controlled by the heart, not the heart controlled by the treasure. Jesus concluded one of his many discourses on money by saying, "You cannot serve both God and Money."²⁰

Church, Money, and Stingy Christians

The stingy Christian doesn't think he is stingy. He is thinking his problem is paying his mortgage; let someone else be responsible for the church's needs. Besides, he's planning to buy an RV and take a trip which will keep him broke for months. The stingy Christian doesn't want to think too much about the good works being done in God's name lest he feel obligated to support them.

The stingy Christian is a spectator Christian. He doesn't want to do anything himself. He just sits on the sidelines and boos, criticizes, and occasionally cheers. He likes to handicap, evaluate and critique what others are doing in Christ's name, but takes no active part, nor does he pursue a ministry of his own.

The Church of God isn't a club with dues, it is a spiritual fellowship created by God and led by his Son. It has important things to do that require all its members to take part in carrying out its work. The Body of Christ is diverse in its various administrations and ministries—churches, evangelism, publishing (this copy of *The Sabbath Sentinel* is an example), research, teaching, counseling, translating, ministering to all kinds of special needs, etc. All these good and noble works need money to function.

The sad fact is that most ministries are not financially prosperous. They limp along, under-funded, their workers and ministers overworked, their budgets paltry. (The entire annual budget of the Bible Sabbath Association would not purchase a fancy SUV with shiny wheels!) All this in the richest most prosperous nation in world history. There is some shame here.

Just as you don't like to think of your life being all about money, you have to acknowledge that your life

and your family run on money. Without money you might end up in a homeless shelter living on someone else's money. Money has a God-given role in making the world work. It has an important role in allowing the church to carry out its commission.

One important lesson I've learned about money and Christians: What a person gives may have nothing to do with what he has. After interacting with thousands of Christians over many years, I've also learned that a Christian with a real heart for God and the things of God is a truly generous person—generous toward God and man.

Some Closing Questions

If you'd like to be more financially committed to any one of the various ministries of the Body of Christ, here are some questions to consider. Ask yourself:

- 1) Am I helped by what I hear, see, or read from this church, TV, or radio program? Do I benefit from their magazine, literature, tapes, videos, counsel, or services? Do I identify with their mission? If you can answer "yes" to any of the above, become a generous supporter.
- 2) Do I agree with the overall thrust of their (whatever group) message and doctrine? (This does not mean agreement on every last point—you can't expect more of a church or para-church ministry than you do from your own mate). Are they sincerely proclaiming the truth of God? If you say "yes," then offer your support.
- 3) Do I want to see this ministry grow and continue to serve others as well as myself? If the answer is "yes," please support them.
- 4) Is the Body of Christ enriched and strengthened by the message and ministry I am presently supporting? Is it a message the entire culture should hear? If so, become even more committed and generous in your giving.

God has been in the giving business longer than you and me. We would be wise to adopt his policies and enjoy his benefits. He lives by the rule of generosity. One word that could never be applied to God is "stingy." We need to see to it that it doesn't fit us either.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul praised the Macedonian churches of God saying,

"Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints."²¹

He called their giving an "act of grace" and counseled the Corinthians to "see that you also excel in this grace of giving."²² I'll let that be the final word for us.

References

- 1 Rabbi Abraham Ben Isaiah and Rabi Benjamin Sharfman, *The Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary*, Deuteronomy volume, Jewish Publishing Society, Philadelphia, 1977, p. 65.
- 2 See Catherine Ponder's book, *The Millionaires of Genesis*, DeVorss & Co, Marine del Rey, CA, 1976.
- 3 Matthew 19:16-22.
- 4 Luke 14:25-35.
- 5 1 Corinthians 16:2.
- 6 Acts 4:32-37.
- 7 Acts 5:1-10.
- 8 Achan was stoned for taking the Babylonish garment and silver. Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, was stricken with leprosy for his covetousness and we read what happened to Ananias and Sapphira.
- 9 Colossians 3:5.
- 10 Acts 20:35.
- 11 Matthew 6:1-4.
- 12 John 3:16.
- 13 Romans 2:4.
- 14 Psalm 24:1
- 15 Luke 7:47.
- 16 Mark 12:17.
- 17 Acts 10:4.
- 18 Matthew 6:20-21.
- 19 Mark 12:41-44
- 20 vs. 24.
- 21 2 Corinthians 8:2, NIV.
- 22 vv. 6, 7.

The Hidden Face of the Persecuted Church

When you think of the Persecuted Church, who comes to mind? Quite possibly you think of pastors in prison. Evangelists tortured. Bold leaders who are beaten for their faith. But there's something missing in this picture. All the faces belong to men. And that image is incomplete!

The reality is that well over half of the Suffering Church today is made up of wives, mothers, and daughters. But their faces are often unseen, their voices rarely heard.

Yet these women are also arrested, imprisoned, and tortured. Many, whose husbands have been locked away or martyred, are left behind to raise fatherless children in cultures that despise them. They are illiterate, unskilled, and unable to find work.

Early in Church history, the Apostle Paul asked the saints to "help these women who labored with me in the gospel...whose names are in the book of life" (Philippians 4:3).

(Source: *Open Doors* (www.opendoors.org).



Winners Define “Orthodoxy”

by Brian Knowles

For some 35 years, I’ve made my living crafting words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs into articles and books. I enjoy words. They are symbols for thoughts. Writing is thinking on paper. Words, however, are not always what they seem. Many of them are loaded with “freight” or “baggage.” Take, for example, the words “orthodoxy” and “heresy.”

The Medical Example

In virtually any profession, you have your “orthodox” practitioners, and your “heretics.” For instance, consider the nomenclature of the medical profession. Mainstream medical practice is referred to in the media, and by itself, as “orthodox” or “conventional.” Sometimes the word “traditional” is used as well. “Standard” medical practice is also called “scientific medicine.” These are all positive words.

Conversely, natural medicine is termed “unorthodox,” “alternative” or even “quackery.” It is viewed as “unscientific.” Generally negative imagery.

As we daily absorb the literature and media that use this nomenclature, we find ourselves buying into it. We accept the idea that it is “normal” or “conventional” to burn, toxify, and cut away body parts, and we embrace the notion that working with the body’s natural physiology is somehow “quackery.” Natural medicine is based on an understanding of how the human body works as a total system. It is quite scientific. When the body becomes toxic, or when the flows of any of its systems are arrested (bowel, liver/gall bladder, kidney/bladder, nerves, blood vessels, lymphatic system, lungs, skin etc. etc.) then the thing to do is detoxify and release blockages so that normal flows can be restored. What’s so unscientific about that?

What’s unscientific about bowel cleansing or releasing stones from the kidney and gall bladder through natural means rather than cutting them out? What’s unorthodox about detoxifying the body, getting good nutrition into it, and rebuilding the immune system, which is our first line of defense against disease? *Why* is that “quackery”?

It’s quackery because those who don’t believe in it have gained power, and those who do have lost it. “Orthodox” medicine is Big Business these days. HMO’s are in business to make a profit, not to get people healthy so that they don’t have to use them. Mainstream medicine is interested in getting rid of its competition. Hence, it must discredit it, and label it “heresy.” Big Drug con-

siders natural foods and supplements “ineffective” because they don’t instantly mask symptoms and cause side effects.

Orthodoxy and heresy are defined by those who win battles for power and influence. In China, the Communist Party decides what is orthodox and what is heresy. Politically, Communism defines one-party rule as orthodox and multi-party competition as heresy. In this country, we see it the opposite way. Who is right? The Communist Party is “right” for China, the Constitution is “right” for America. The point is: orthodoxy and heresy are not defined objectively, but by power.

Theological Orthodoxy & Heresy

In recent days, the world has been transfixed by the death pageant surrounding the pope. The world’s largest Christian church has lost its leader. For millions of Catholics the world over, the pope was the paragon of orthodoxy. World leaders have recognized his preeminent position in Christianity by beating a path to his coffin. The Roman Catholic Church views itself as the guardian of Christian orthodoxy. All other claims must be evaluated in the light of its official dogma and doctrine.

Protestants of course disagree. The various cults also disagree – both with Catholicism and Protestantism. The Orthodox Churches – both Russian and Greek – also disagree. Who is truly orthodox, and who is heretical?

Within the Christian Church, as in the medical profession, orthodoxy is determined by those who won the power struggles for dominance. Bart D. Ehrman writes: “During the first two and a half centuries, Christianity comprised a number of competing theologies, or better, a number of competing Christian groups advocating a variety of theologies. There was as yet no established ‘orthodoxy,’ that is, no basic theological system acknowledged by the majority of church leaders and laity. Different local churches supported different understandings of the religion, while different understandings of the religion were present even within the same local church” (*The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture*, p. 4).

Sect of the Nazarene

In its original form, the “Church” was not an institution but a “sect” within Judaism. It was known as “the sect of the Nazarene” and it revolved around the teachings of *Yeshua* the Jewish Rabbi (Acts 24:5). It was also known as “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 24:14). The religion of Jesus and his followers was Judaism, not

"Christianity." The word "Christian" was not even invented in Jesus' day. It was not until more than a decade after Jesus' resurrection – around 43 AD – that the term "Christian" was coined in gentile Antioch, possibly as a pejorative (Acts 11:26). Until the gentiles began fellowshiping with the Jewish believers in response to Paul's Gospel, what later became known as "The Church" was a wholly Jewish "witnessing body" (Hebrew = *edah*). The Jewish apostles bore witness to what they had seen and heard.

The first followers of Jesus had no formal theology. The story of Jesus' life and teachings was not even written down until some 40 years after his resurrection. Everything the early Christians knew, they knew from word of mouth (oral tradition). In the mid-fifties, the letters of Paul were first copied and circulated among the gentile congregations that were springing up all over the Roman Empire. Most of these groups were founded from synagogue Jews and "God-fearer" gentiles and proselytes who fellowshiped with them in their synagogues (Acts 10:1, 22; 13:42, 49).

For the first decades of its existence, the fledgling Church had no formal or structured theology. The Jewish Christians practiced the tenets of normative Judaism. The God-fearers among them were like Noahides. They adopted the aspects of Jesus' and the apostle's Judaism that applied to gentiles. Yet they knew they were not under all of the same obligations to *Torah* as were the Jewish believers. This is clear from a close study of the implications of the Jerusalem Conference recorded in Acts 15 and the letter that followed it.

The teachings, doctrines, dogmas and theologies that emerged from the gentile Church in the centuries following the deaths of the original apostles bore little resemblance to the fundamentally Jewish teaching of the earlier Church. In fact the edifice of subsequent church theology was erected upon a foundation of anti-Judaism.

Enter Constantine

The Roman Emperor, Constantine, was the founder of the "Holy Roman Empire" and the one who ended persecution against the Church. In 325 AD, he called the Council of Nicea, at which the basis for much Catholic theology was established. It was Constantine who married Church and State in what turned out to be an unholy alliance. Following Nicea, the emperor wrote a letter to the Christian churches of which he was now the head. In it he excoriated the Jews, their teachings, their character and their right to represent God. He deemed it "...a most unworthy thing that we should follow the custom of the Jews in the celebration of this most holy solemnity [Easter], who, polluted wretches! Having stained their hands with this nefarious crime [killing Christ], are justly blinded in their minds..."

He wrote of "...rejecting the practice of this people..." and he said, "Let us have nothing in com-

mon with the most hostile rabble of the Jews...that most odious fellowship...the vilest of mankind...these parricides and murderers of our Lord..." etc., etc., etc.

Dan Gruber says of Constantine's purple prose: "In this letter, Constantine officially establishes an anti-Judaic foundation for the doctrine and practice of the Church, and declares that contempt for the Jews, and separation from them, is the only proper Christian attitude" (*The Church and the Jews* by Dan Gruber, pp. 33-35, excerpts).

With the power of the Roman Empire behind him, Constantine was in a position to enforce any kind of doctrine and thinking he wanted to. Needless to say, the Church became the "Church of Constantine." He was the 600-lb. gorilla who decided the direction it would take from that time forth. Needless to say, it moved farther and farther away from its Jewish roots and deeper and deeper into Greek and pagan philosophy. In fact, the formation of doctrine in the Church was influenced by many streams: Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism (the religion of the Persians), the allegorical method of interpretation (as set forth by Origen), and various prevailing manifestations of paganism. It became truly a "Catholic" – that is, Universal – religion. The Jews, and Jewish Christians, were left in the dust.

The purity and simplicity of the original apostle's doctrine (Acts 2:42) was contaminated by the inflow of a wide variety of toxic streams. The Church that emerged in the wake of Constantine was a far cry from Jerusalem. It was gentile through and through. Its doctrines continued to evolve and develop over a period of many centuries. Many of them bore no resemblance to the "thought worlds" of the Old and New Testaments. The Church, under the heavy-handed guidance of Rome, had the power to define "orthodoxy" in any way it wanted to, and it did just that. As Gruber writes, "God's Truth was to be determined by Church councils, and not by the Word of God. Consequently the teaching which was a blasphemous heresy to Justin Martyr became the new, unchallengeable orthodoxy" (*The Church and the Jews*, p. 39).

Gruber sums up what happened this way: "Constantine and Eusebius institutionalized many serious errors. They made changes that were to plunge the Church and the world into a literal thousand years of darkness. They laid a different foundation than Jesus and His apostles had laid. A new era in the history of the Church had begun. In actuality, a new Church began" (ibid. p. 40).

Throughout ecclesiastical history, the same principle – that power defines orthodoxy – has prevailed. When the Reformers gained power in various parts of the so-called "Holy" Roman Empire, they too imposed their doctrine as orthodox. Those who dissented were sometimes burned at the stake. When Henry VIII established himself as head of the Anglican Church, he defined orthodoxy in accordance with his own wants and needs.

Within autocratic, smaller sects and denominations, the leader *du jour* is able to enforce his will as being orthodox, and all who disagree are by definition, heretics. It was ever thus in the world of religion. It's a variation on the old theme: "Might makes right."

Perhaps this is the reason the synagogue, to its credit, has long been a democratic institution. Consequently, no rabbinic tyrant has been able to force his will upon the whole of Judaism, or even upon one of its divisions. For all of its antiquity, Judaism is nowhere near as divided as Christianity with its thousands of denominations. Judaism has only three main groupings: Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. Within those groups, there are variations, but nothing like the chaos we Christians have experienced. But then, it's probably a good thing, as I wrote in an earlier column. At least it prevents any one group from imposing its orthodoxy on the rest of us. We are free, therefore, to live in conscience toward God.

Brian Knowles is an artist and writer. His "Out of the Box" column is a regular feature on the Association for Christian Development Web site: <http://www.godward.org/>.

Nickels: "Marriage Ceremony" continued from Page 4.

find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.... Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.... Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom: and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children rise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.... a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised," Proverbs 31:10-12, 23, 25-30. Love begets love. Mark and Amanda, may your love grow, and abide continually.

And what is love like? Love suffers long, is kind, envies not, is not rash, is not puffed up, is unselfish, is not easily provoked, doesn't think evil. Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. And now abide faith, hope, and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13).

This is how happy marriages were designed to work: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head

of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and He is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing," Ephesians 5:22-25. Marriage is not a 50-50 proposition. Each person must work at it 100% for their marriage to succeed.

"Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for itSo ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himselflet every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and wife see that she reverence [respect] her husband," verses 25, 28, 33.

Marriage is for life. "The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord," 1 Corinthians 7:39.

God designed marriage, a divine institution, to be a life-long relationship of love.

Now, before we enter into a covenant with God to bind this marriage for life, I would like to say a few personal things. *Mark*: I am proud to be your father-in-law. You are a kind and good man. Take care of my precious daughter. Be a man! God puts on your shoulders the responsibility to be the leader of this family. Do it well, with His help. I know you will succeed. *Amanda*: Love your husband, support him in every way. You are the type of person who never gives up. Go with God; you always have my total love and support. *Both of you*: should God bless you with children, train them up in the ways of the Lord, to be good citizens of this nation and of God's kingdom.

Mark Allen Byrd, do you solemnly affirm that you will take Amanda Ruth Nickels as your lawful wedded wife, to love her and cherish her, in sickness and in health, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, as long as you both shall live?

Amanda Ruth Nickels, do you solemnly affirm that you will take Mark Allen Byrd as your lawful wedded husband, to love him and cherish him, in sickness and in health, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness or in health, as long as you both shall live?

And now, we will ask God to bind this marriage in a covenant for life (kneeling and prayer, followed by the exchanging of rings).

Inasmuch as Mark and Amanda have made these vows before God and these witnesses, and as they come together in one flesh, their marriage is binding for life before God. You may kiss the bride (pause). Ladies and gentlemen, I present to you Mr. and Mrs. Mark Byrd!

Richard Nickels is president of the Bible Sabbath Association and founder and director of Giving and Sharing, a Christian support ministry (www.giveshare.org).

glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but **let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me**, that I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,' says the LORD" (Jeremiah 9:23-24). Notice that what God really wants is for His people to know Him and understand Him. He is almost like a father who has to kick one of his children out of the house. In human terms He is saying, "I have treated you well, provided you a good home, taken care of you when you were sick, and all I have gotten in return is rebellion, contempt, and disrespect. Now get out of my house until you can come back without contempt in your soul."

In the Lord's heart there is love, forgiveness, and redemption. That is His true nature and character. Here is what He says about those in Judah who were driven out of the land: "Then the word of the LORD came to me: 'Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: "Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not uproot them. **I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD**, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart'" (Jeremiah 24:5-7).

God's first thought is always to show kindness and offer redemption, even after punishment and exile. God's wrath does not last forever, but His love does. This may be a fine distinction, but the problem is not really one of obedience to the law, but our inability to think of God as both Father and friend. That is why He tells Jeremiah that he will give them a different kind of heart—one that is capable of knowing that He is the Lord.

Dr. Henry Blackaby, who wrote the great devotional study called **Experiencing God**, put it in this manner: "The way God prepares you is to deal with your heart, not your skills and activity. The key to serving God is not your knowledge of everything; it is your knowledge of Him. He can transcend anything, anywhere, at any time, as long as He has your heart. Because you obey Him, He will bring forth fruit. If you abide in the vine, which is Christ, you will produce much fruit" (see *John 15:5, excerpted from the article "A Friend of God"*).

It is interesting to me that in our relationships with people we reject the idea that our worth is determined by performance. We are horrified when we see parents who dole out love to their children based on their ability to meet certain performance standards set by the parents. The children grow up with the idea that

they are never quite good enough, and as adults they tend to accept the same performance-based "love" that they were taught as children. We know that this leads to psychological problems and difficulty in forming stable bonds with future spouses. Yet, we don't hesitate to ascribe to God the same qualities that we reject in humans.

God does not describe Himself the same way we often see Him. To Him, His eternal, unchangeable qualities are love, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, and goodness. We all know the passage from Malachi: "For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob" (Malachi 3:6). What does this tell us about God? It tells us that His mercy will never change. His anger lasts only for a while, but His love for us is eternal and unalterable. He has no desire to destroy us. As King David wrote in Psalm 30:5, "For his anger is but for a moment; His favor is for a life-time: Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy cometh in the morning."

God's Unchangeable Qualities

Many Christians make the mistake of assuming that one of God's unchangeable qualities is that He is always a little edgy and somewhat irritable—that He never tires of looking to punish the smallest violation of His law. For these people, the only way to avoid God's wrath and ensure salvation is to find every possible violation of the law that might anger God, and make sure they are obedient to all the minutiae of regulations that the law demands. To be honest, these people believe that you may have been saved from your sins at baptism, but if you step out of line after that, God will fry you in the lake of fire. All I can say is that these people do not understand God or what He wants.

Think about that depiction of our Heavenly Father in contrast to what Hebrews and James say about Abraham, father of the faithful, and his relationship with God: "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Hebrews 11:8). And, "Abraham believed and he is called God's friend" (James 2:23).

It has often been said that the Bible is not shy about showing the sins and flaws of its heroes. We have read about the sins of Abraham, Moses, King David, and others. Were they forgiven for their sins, or did God cast them out of His presence? James states that Abraham was God's friend. If we by faith are the children of Abraham, can we not also count ourselves as God's friends? We also see Moses referred to as God's friend: "And the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11).

How many times in the New Testament do we see the term "Abba" used to refer to our Heavenly Father? Jesus uses it; Paul uses it. Abba is a term of endear-

ment in the Aramaic language, like the word “Dad” in English.

What Should We Seek?

Many Christians worry a great deal about the law, as if it were an end in itself. The law is necessary, but it is not the end we seek. The end we seek is Christ, “to know him and the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10). The purpose of the law is to bring us into a personal relation with Christ. The law by itself does not determine our salvation; Christ does. It is Him we seek, not some set of regulations that will somehow make us more acceptable to God. The law is a framework for our relationship with Christ and the Father. We do not seek to be in love with the framework. We seek to love Christ and the Father.

What’s more, Christ and the Father seek us. They sought us long before we knew how to seek them. Their desire has always been to bring into being a loving family around them. God’s laws are merely the household rules that enable our relationship with Christ and the Father to flourish. There is no other way to explain the message of John 3:16 than to say that God’s first order is to extend to us His love—His most enduring eternal quality. When the external application of the law failed because of the flaw of mankind’s inherent selfish nature, God began to write His laws into our hearts and into our minds by His Spirit so that we would not fail in our effort to know Him and fellowship with Him (*ref.* Hebrews 8:6-10).

The Message of John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:16-17).

How many times have we recited these verses by memory? In many cases they were the first Bible verses we ever memorized, and with good reason. Let’s look at a few things this passage says and does not say.

First, Jesus came into the world to save you, whether you were commandment-keeping, church-going believer or the worst sinner imaginable. He came to save you. Your commandment keeping did not save you; God’s Son did. Without Christ we would all live out our time on this earth and simply die—both the righteous and the wicked. The same death would come to both. It was the love of Christ and the Father that saved you, not anything you did previously.

Second, it was love, not some legal demand, that saved you. God’s unchangeable love sought you out and brought you to His Son, who is the only way to eternal life. God’s first thought has always been to redeem, not to destroy. He is not looking for excuses to condemn you; He is looking for ways to save you so

that He can enjoy your company throughout eternity. That is how much you are worth to Him. Each life is different, and He relishes the thought of spending eternity with you so much that He was willing to put His own Son in your place at the crucifixion so that you might live. That is why our worth to God is not calculated by our ability to keep any code of laws. Our worth comes through Him who kept His Father’s commandments and brought us back from a sure death sentence.

You see, it is a matter of where we put the emphasis. If we seek to attain favor with God through the keeping of the law, we will always fail, and we will always feel like failures. Jesus’ yoke will be burdensome, not light as he promised. Our worth as Christians is in our relationship with Christ and the Father; it is not in the law or any set of regulations. We seek to obey Christ and the Father because we love them and because we are grateful for Their immeasurable love toward us. It is because of the Father’s love for us that He has given us the Spirit of His obedient Son so that we might walk obediently in His ways and be saved. Through the very presence of the life of God in us we no longer live to avoid failure and punishment at the hands of an angry God. That heavy yoke has been lifted from our shoulders and been replaced with the light and freeing yoke of Christ our Savior.

Conclusion

My desire is that this article will give every Christian renewed hope in his future and in his relationship with God. Never forget the words that Jesus spoke to His disciples at the Last Supper: “No one has greater love than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you” (John 15:13-15).

It is clear from the Scriptures: Obedience that is pleasing to God is that which is generated in our hearts out of a love for Christ and the Father. Perfect love casts out fear. As the apostle John says in 1 John 3:17-19, “In this is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment, that as He is, so also we are in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. He who fears has not been perfected in love. We love Him because He first loved us.” If we obey God out of fear, we are on the wrong track. Our Heavenly Father desires most of all to enjoy an open, loving fellowship with you. He invites you to take hold of faith, to put away your fears, and enjoy His presence here and now. If we do that, eternity will take care of itself.

—Kenneth Ryland

How Important Is Attitude for Bible Study?

by *Tommy Willis*

As Christians we know we are supposed to study our Bible diligently, but to be able to receive the spiritual insight God wants us to gain, the attitude in which we study is extremely important.

We often want to go about Bible studies to become intellectual and biblical scholars, rather than coming to meet the Lord Jesus through the pages of God's Word. This relates to what Jesus said in Matthew 11:25: "...I thank you, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hid these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes."

Here we see the importance of having a child-like attitude in order to have *revelation* from God. We may study the Scriptures diligently (as the Pharisees did) but not be able to receive God's revelation because of the attitude with which we approach the study.

We can study the Bible diligently and be able to quote from cover to cover with amazing brilliance, knowing all the right doctrine. But until we learn to approach our studies with a tender child-like attitude, we will never receive from God the revelation necessary to illuminate the written Word.

"I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones" (Isaiah 57:15).
"**... God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble**" (James 4:6).

If we want to be properly led by God's Spirit, then we cannot afford to get into a proud attitude.

"Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD" (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

We can wind up glorying in the wisdom we feel we have gained from a lifetime of Bible study, feeling we see many things that others don't see. And we can then pass right over these biblical principles that tell us how God will hide from and resist those who become wise in their own eyes. When we get into this attitude, God will not communicate with us, except, perhaps a rebuke.

Jesus said, "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life" (John 5:39-40 RSV). Here we see that one can study the Scriptures and not come to meet the Lord Jesus in those studies.

It is easy to get away from simply sitting before Jesus Christ and asking Him to take us by the hand and lead us through the Bible so that we will come to know Him. All too often we boast of some technical approach with which we are trying to study the Bible. We may boast of how we have gone over the Greek and Hebrew, and how we have specific insight from years of study. Studies like this have their place, and I'm not trying to belittle those studies. But if we allow ourselves to become proud, then we drift into danger, and we can wind up missing the basic biblical truths that just about any translation will show.

"For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1Corinthians 1:19).

To approach God with a child-like, tender attitude is so important for our studies. The more we depend on our own wisdom, the more God's Word is hidden to us, and the less we will be able to see, even if we strongly desire it.

But to the humble heart and mind God's revelation will come forth to feed it the spiritual food necessary. As each is able to handle God's spiritual nourishment, he will be brought forward, step by step, in spiritual development.

Let us learn to approach God with the child-like humility necessary in our Bible study. Then He can give us the wisdom of Christ. He is our wisdom.

"But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (1Corinthians 1:30).

As we learn that we cannot depend on our own wisdom, we will then see the need to seek the wisdom of God, but the more we depend on our own wisdom, the more we will be blinded to the true wisdom from above. As we acknowledge our lack before God and come before Him with this child-like attitude, not self-willed but open and tender, then He will shine His light on the pages of the Bible so we can be taught properly.

In Luke 24:13-47 we see after Jesus resurrected from the dead, walking along the road talking with two brethren, and they did not know who He was. Luke tells us how He opened the Scriptures to them. Jesus' lesson to them and to us is that if we will walk along with Him and seek His instruction, He will open the Scriptures to us also. Each day as you study, ask Jesus Christ to take you by the hand and walk you through the Scriptures.

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Saudis Shred Bibles, Rights Campaigners Claim

By Patrick Goodenough
CNSNews.com International Editor
May 19, 2005

(CNSNews.com) - Bibles found in the possession of visitors to Saudi Arabia are routinely confiscated by customs officials, and in some cases copies allegedly have been put through a paper shredder, according to religious rights campaigners.

Reports from the Islamic world of the abuse of Bibles and other items important to Christians emerge from time to time, but generally have little impact - in contrast to the wave of Muslim anger sparked by a Newsweek report, since retracted, of Koran desecration by the U.S. military.

"The Muslims respect the Koran far more than Christians respect the Bible," says Danny Nalliah, a Sri Lankan-born evangelical pastor now based in Australia.

During the 1990s, Nalliah spent two years in Saudi Arabia, where he was deeply involved with the underground church.

"It's a very well-known fact that if you have a Bible at customs when you enter the airport, and if they find the Bible, that the Bible is taken and put in the shredder," he said in an interview this week.

"If you have more than one Bible you will be taken into custody, and if you have a quantity of Bibles you will be given 70 lashes for sure - you could even be executed."

Nalliah had not himself seen a Bible being shredded but said the practice was widely acknowledged among Christians in the kingdom.

Abuse of Christians and their symbols was not restricted to the destruction of Bibles, he added.

A friend of his, a fellow Christian in Saudi Arabia, told him of witnessing a particularly unpleasant incident involving a Catholic nun.

The man had been in the transit lounge at the airport in Jeddah - the gateway to Mecca, used by millions of Hajj pilgrims each year - when a nun arrived at the customs desk.

"Some fool [travel agent] had put her on a transit flight in Jeddah. You don't do that to a Catholic nun, because she's going to be tormented."

"They opened her bag, went through her prayer book, put the prayer book through the shredder ...

took the crucifix off her neck and smashed it, tormented her for many minutes."

Eventually another Muslim official objected to their conduct, came across and "rescued" her, pointing out to the customs officials that she was not entering the country but only in transit and would be leaving on the next plane.

Briefed beforehand about the risks, Nalliah said he did not carry a Bible when he arrived in the kingdom in 1995.

Subsequently, however, he took possession of hundreds of Bibles that had been smuggled into Saudi Arabia to be used by believers there.

Nalliah said he had a close call one morning when armed members of the notorious Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice - the religious police, or *muttawa* - hammered at his front door at 1 a.m.

With 400 smuggled Bibles "sitting on the dining room table," he believed his life to be in serious danger. "That was a crime equal to rape, murder, armed robbery, and in Saudi Arabia you get the same punishment," he said - the death penalty.

Think Tank Affirms that Saudis Do Destroy Bibles

In a follow-up report (May 23, 2005) CNSNews.com was able to affirm prior allegations that the Saudi government actively pursues a policy of destroying Bibles.

CNSNews reported the following:

"A U.S.-based think tank critical of the Saudi government has added its voice to allegations that authorities in the kingdom routinely destroy Bibles.

" 'As a matter of official policy, the government either incinerates or dumps Bibles, crosses and other Christian paraphernalia,' the Saudi Institute said in an article posted on its website.

"Although considered as holy in Islam and mentioned in the Koran dozens of times, the Bible is banned in Saudi Arabia, and is confiscated and destroyed by government officials," it said."

Every year human rights organizations list Saudi Arabia as one of the world's worst violators of religious freedom.

The **CNSNews** report continues: "In another article posted on its site — and published as an op-ed in the Wall Street Journal on Friday — Saudi Institute director Ali Al-Ahmed wrote of his fellow Saudis: 'As Muslims, we have not been as generous as our Christian and Jewish counterparts in respecting others' holy books and religious symbols.' "

Nalliah said he had prayed earnestly and, in what he could only describe as a miracle, the men left without entering his home.

“Contraband”

Claims of Bible desecration in Saudi Arabia have been made by others.

“One Christian recently reported that his personal Bible was put into a shredder once he entered customs,” the late Nagi Kheir, spokesman for the American Coptic Association and a veteran campaigner for religious freedom in the Middle East, wrote in an article several years ago.

“Some Christians have reported that upon entering Saudi Arabia they have had their personal Bibles taken from them and placed into a paper shredder,” the U.S.-based organization International Christian Concern said in a 2001 report.

In its most recent report on religious freedom around the world, the State Department made no reference to Bible destruction, but said they were considered contraband.

“Customs officials routinely open mail and shipments to search for contraband, including ... non-Muslim materials, such as Bibles and religious videotapes,” it said. “Such materials are subject to confiscation, although rules appear to be applied arbitrarily.”

In a 2003 report on Saudi Arabia, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an independent watchdog set up under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act, said: “Customs officials regularly confiscate Bibles and other religious material when Christian foreign workers arrive at the airport from their home countries initially or return from a vacation.”

Inquiries about the legality of Bibles and about the shredder claims, sent to the Saudi Embassy in Washington and the Saudi Information Ministry in Riyadh, were not answered by press time.

Koran vs. Bible

After Nalliah left Saudi Arabia in 1997, he went to the U.S. and took part in the lobbying effort on Capitol Hill in support of what eventually became the International Religious Freedom Act, signed into law the following year.

He heads an evangelical ministry in Australia, where late last year he and a colleague became the first people to be found guilty under a controversial state religious hatred law, after Muslims accused them of vilifying Islam during a post-9/11 seminar for Christians.

Nalliah said this week it did not surprise him that Muslims have reacted strongly to the claims that U.S. interrogators at the Guantanamo Bay base, where terrorism suspects are held, had thrown a Koran into the toilet.

While Bible scholars say the Bible is written by men who were inspired by God, Muslims believe the Koran is “the copy of an original that is sitting in heaven, and has been sent down [by revelation to Mohammed].”

The book is seen as something sacred in itself, he explained, its words having come “directly from Allah. That’s why they are so mad when they think something [unseemly] is being done to the Koran.”

A Muslim will never keep a Koran at ground level, for instance.

The Pentagon says a January 2003 memo issued to U.S. personnel at Guantanamo Bay instructed them to “ensure that the Koran is not placed in offensive areas such as the floor, near the toilet or sink, near the feet, or dirty/wet areas.”

Even in Western societies, Nalliah noted, copies of Bibles could often be found in witness boxes of courts, ready for use when witnesses are sworn in. But the Koran will generally be kept in safe storage elsewhere, covered in cloth, to be brought in when required by a Muslim witness.

He said such reverence for the Koran stood in stark contrast to some Muslims’ feelings about the Bible, however.

Nalliah said the Koran was “confusing” on this score. In places (e.g.: sura 29:46-47) it appeared to urge Muslims to respect the Bible and those who believe in it; elsewhere it exhorts them to fight those who don’t accept Islam until they pay tribute and accept inferior status (sura 9:29-31).

According to author and Islam scholar Robert Spencer, “a devout Muslim might very well mistreat a Bible, because traditional Islamic theology regards it as a corrupted and unreliable version of the genuine revelations that were given to Moses, Jesus, and other Prophets.”

Spencer noted that in sura 9:30 the Koran says those who believe Jesus is the Son of God are under Allah’s curse.

“Throughout history, most Muslim theologians have held that the New Testament has been tampered with since it teaches that Jesus is the Son of God.”

Some of the more notorious reported incidents of Muslims abusing Christian symbols implicate Palestinian radicals, including the trashing of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem in 2002; and the desecration of Maronite churches in Damour, Lebanon in 1976.

In the Damour episode, Yasser Arafat’s PLO killed more than 500 of the Christian town’s inhabitants before turning it into a stronghold, and used the interior of the St. Elias church for a shooting range, according to published accounts.

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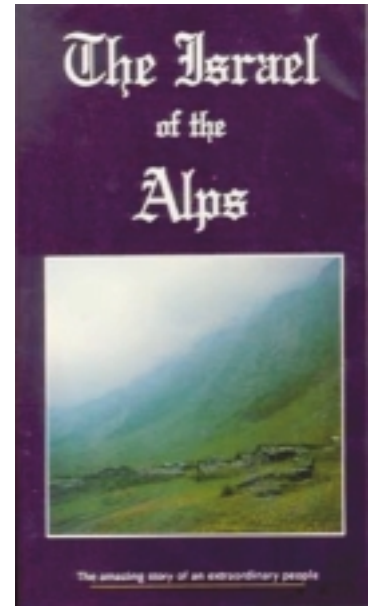
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