

The Sabbath Sentinel

November–December 2006



*Thankful for
God's Provision*

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

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

The Sabbath Sentinel

November–December 2006 Volume 58, No. 6 Issue 522

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Our Cover: *Thanksgiving: A time for gratitude toward God*
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Thanksgiving

I sit here today, able to write this piece because of the wonderful grace and love of our great Creator God. The people of God had wandered through the nations for centuries, persecuted here, chased out there, and the great God of all mercy decided to give them rest in this wonderful land. Abundant in resources, rich in potential, this land, separated from the world by oceans, was the perfect resting place for His people. Of course, he knew that our people would not be still once we got here because the people of God are industrious, but we would have room to grow, experiment, develop, and mature.

It is not surprising to me that many of the earlier settlers of what we now call the United States of America believed that God was replanting Israel in this new land. The land was fertile, water abundant, and open for settlement. God was bringing His people in to settle it.

Some readers may think that I am idealizing our American history. Remember this: civilization never moves forward without ideals that beckon us to reach for the stars. The details of our progress, once examined under the microscope of history, never appear in any way to measure up to our ideals. Ideals are never reached in this manner. The realization of ideals is seen in the general flow of the progress of our whole civilization. It is also manifest in the lives of those few special individuals who "catch the vision," and by the sheer dint of their passion draw others after them.

Increasingly these days I meet Christians who have little appreciation for the political and religious freedom we have or for the ideals on which our freedoms rest. Either they have become jaded by the bickering and often underhanded tactics of politicians, or they have become captives of their own desire for "the government" to "do something" for them personally. They have scant appreciation for their precious gift that too few people in this world possess, and demonstrate a whining, slavish mentality toward government. All I can say to these people is that if Christians will not take command of their political and religious circumstances, they have by

default elected the godless to rule over them and to legislate sin into law for the purpose of enslaving them and their children.

I have heard people say that the ideals of our founders are nice to reflect on, but they have no practical value. They cannot be attained, so we should not consider them seriously. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The reason one has ideals is that they have not yet become a reality. By their very nature ideals are signposts ahead of us that draw us forward. If they are ever reached, we set our sights even higher. As Christians that is what we should be doing personally, and as citizens of this country or any other, we should bring our own personal growth to bear on our close relationships and in our communities.

I would like to make this suggestion as we approach the season of Thanksgiving. Let's take a one-day vacation from complaining about the government, our neighbors, our kids, or our spouses. Let's drink to the full of the precious gift of political and religious freedom that is our birthright because those before us heard the call of God to offer freedom to all who might enter our shores.

In each issue of *The Sabbath Sentinel* I publish at least one story of Christians in other nations who are persecuted with threats, beatings, imprisonment, or execution. I hope you read these stories. It is not only a reminder to pray for our brothers and sisters in such difficult circumstances. It also draws our attention back to the great kindness of our Father who set us in this land and gave us these freedoms. Our freedoms are maintained and expanded by bringing God's righteousness into every arena that our lives touch. That is our calling. It is not a passive calling. Where righteousness prevails, men do not have to be governed by force. Laws are unnecessary because men govern themselves.

I hope every reader of *The Sabbath Sentinel* will enjoy a wondrous Thanksgiving. God gave us this gift without regret. Let's enjoy it without regret.

—Kenneth Ryland

A Case of Rigor Mortis

by Kenneth Westby



A sure evidence of death is the progressive stiffening of the corpse as muscle proteins coagulate. The condition is called rigor mortis, and forensic specialists can determine the time of death by measuring how far along the stiffening has progressed. When rigor mortis is complete, the body is stiff. The low brow vernacular for a dead body, frequently heard in gangster movies, is simply “a stiff.”

The sight of a pale, prone, and stiff corpse lying on a morgue’s cold stainless steel table is a depressingly hopeless scene. If the corpse is a loved one, the scene is oppressive, heavy with sadness. Apart from the power of our life-giving Creator to vivify that loved one, life itself would ring with hopelessness.

Yet we are far from hopeless. We know the hope of the dead is the speech of God, his call to “Wake up O Sleeper! Wake up my son, my daughter! Arise! Come forth to me!” When similar words were said to Jesus, as he lay stiffly on a cold rock slab, he immediately stood up and walked out of the tomb. He now lives forever.

Death spells the end of all our thoughts and movements. Death is poignantly observed as the state of rigor mortis overtakes our once active body. There is nothing we can do about its eventual arrival. One day we will all die.

There is an equally serious condition to that described above, yet it is a state we can do something about. It is spiritual in nature. It is a spiritual condition common to the living—including many of us Christians.

Spiritual Rigor Mortis

This spiritual condition can be described as a death-like case of inflexibility, immobility, stiffening, rigidity, coldness—a case of spiritual rigor mortis. Unfortunately, this is not a rare phenomenon. Rather than following death, it precedes it among many Christians.

Specifically, what is spiritual rigor mortis? It is the inability to move Godward—to change, to grow, to stand up for Jesus. In fact, it is the unwillingness to stand up for anything important, if standing up requires risk, money, time, inconvenience, or “heaven forbid,” effort.

Rigor-mortis Christians are spectators, sitting on their duffs, either watching and grousing about an evil world getting more evil, or critiquing those stand-up Christians as they strive, grow and attempt to do some work for God. These sedentary watcher-Christians are not likely to admit that they are in a spiritually dead condition. In fact, if they found themselves in a bull-session discussion of Christian martyrdom, from the comforts of home or local church, they would probably give all present the impression they would stand up for Jesus and die if necessary. This points up another fact about rigor mortis Christians: the only thing that moves is their mouth. But talk alone is never a substitute for action.

About 250 A.D. the Roman emperors Decius and Valerian began a murderous campaign of persecution against Christians. Roman fortunes of empire were then in decline and the rapidly growing Christian movement was a convenient scapegoat to be blamed. While persecutions against Christians came from time to time, this was the first systematic attempt by the empire to crush Christianity.

In his history of the last days of Rome, Richard E. Rubenstein describes the imperial plan: “The strategy was simple: all subjects were ordered to sacrifice to the immortal gods or else risk the death penalty.”^[1] How do you think the persecution proceeded? Would most Christians stand up for Jesus and refuse to do sacrificial worship to the Roman gods? Would most cave in to save their skins?

The plan worked and one reason for its success was the condition of the church itself. “The Christian movement had grown rapidly and now included large numbers of respectable citizens who had no taste for martyrdom or imprisonment. Far more of its members obeyed imperial orders or bribed their way out of trouble than risked the emperor’s displeasure. In the first year of the persecution, says one historian, ‘Christians joined with their pagan neighbors in a rush to sacrifice,’ and ‘the Christian church practically collapsed.’”^[2]

The state terror continued for a decade, and amazingly, the church emerged stronger than ever. Among the ranks of believers sifting and sorting en-

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Cause and Effect and the Myth of Unconditional Love



by Daniel Botkin

When God created the heavens and the earth, He built into this universe a system of cause and effect. The world operates by laws of cause and effect. For every effect there is a cause. Nothing happens or comes into existence without some known or unknown cause behind it.

God made it clear to Adam that his choices would be the cause of either positive or negative consequences. Choosing to eat from the tree of life would produce the effect of life; choosing to eat from the tree of knowledge would produce the effect of death. If Adam died, there would be a cause behind his death. Some 5,000 years after Adam's death, we still realize that death does not happen without some cause behind it. When we hear that someone has died, we usually ask, "How did it happen?"

This phenomenon of cause and effect is very obvious when the effect is something as serious and irreversible as death. But when the effect is something less serious than death, it is easy to forget (or even to deny) that there is a cause behind the effect. Because we live in a world of cause and effect, we should assume that whenever something happens, whether good or bad, there is some cause behind it. (This does not mean that every bad thing that happens to us is always the result of our own personal sins. Sometimes it is, but sometimes it is a test of our faith, as was the case with Job.)

The Bible is filled with statements of cause and effect. Many of the warnings to obey God's commandments are worded in the language of cause and effect. "If you do this, then I will do that;" "Do this... so that...;" "Don't do that... lest...;" "Thou shalt not... or else!" The first few chapters of Deuteronomy contain several cause-and-effect warnings like these.

"If... then..." statements are conditional. When God says, "If you will obey Me, then I will bless you," He is not obligated to bless you unless you first obey Him. Your obedience becomes the cause of God's blessings. Conversely, your disobedience becomes the cause of God's curses.

Some people do not like to hear about consequences and conditions when discussing the blessings of God. Some folks believe that God's love is unconditional, that He loves everybody, even the wicked, unconditionally. There is so much talk in the church world about God's "unconditional love" that many people mistakenly assume that this idea is from the Bible.

In a general, universal sense, God's love for the human race as a whole could perhaps be called "unconditional" (see John 3:16). But God does not have unconditional love for every individual of the human race. There are some individuals whom God hates. This is not just Daniel Botkin's personal opinion; it is what the Bible plainly states. Psalm 5:5 says that God hates all workers of iniquity. Psalm 11:5 says He hates the wicked and lovers of violence. Proverbs 6:19 says He hates a false witness who speaks lies, and he who sows discord among brethren.

It may disappoint some readers to hear this, but God does not unconditionally love every individual of the human race. He does not unconditionally love workers of iniquity, nor the wicked, nor lovers of violence, nor false witnesses who speak lies, nor those who sow discord among brethren. God hates these individuals, the Bible says.

To speak of "unconditional love" implies that there is no "If... then...," that there is no cause and effect. But we live in a world of cause and effect. If a person

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The Christians of Tyre

The Mediterranean seaport city of Tyre already had a very ancient history in the time of Christ's first coming. Located in what is today Lebanon, Jesus Christ was well-familiar with Tyre, which was only about 40 miles north of Nazareth (in contrast, Jerusalem was about 70 miles south of Nazareth). Many of the non-Israelite people of Tyre also became eagerly familiar with the teachings of the Messiah and became converted "before their time" - a profound irony, as explained below, but nevertheless a shining example of how the natural power of good character can find its way to a far greater power of good.

"But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you"

Some people of Tyre were among those who came to follow Christ at the time that His ministry had barely begun. In this example, they were already there before the Messiah had chosen the twelve apostles. Notice however that "He straitly charged them that they should not make Him known" -- definitely not something that a man seeking the widest possible audience, at that time, would say.

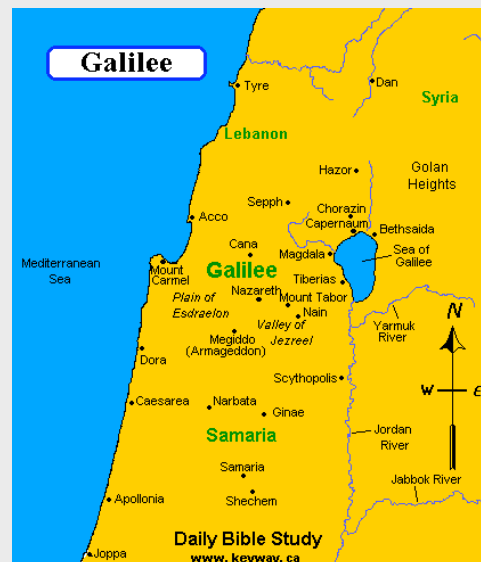
"But Jesus withdrew Himself with His disciples to the sea: and a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and from beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they had heard what great things He did, came unto Him. And He spake to His disciples, that a small ship should wait on Him because of the multitude, lest they should throng Him. For He had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon Him for to touch Him, as many as had plagues. And unclean spirits, when they saw Him, fell down before Him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. And He straitly charged them that they should not make Him known."

"And He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto Him whom He would: and they came unto Him. And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach, And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils: And Simon He surnamed Peter; And James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James; and He surnamed them Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder: And Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Canaanite, And Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed Him" (Mark 3:7-19 KJV).

In this example, Christ went up to Tyre, not to preach, but to remain anonymous, because, for the most part, it was not yet their time. That's why He used the stark "it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs" analogy, not as an insult, but rather to illustrate how He had not come to preach to everyone, yet (He sometimes used parables for that same reason, to hide the meaning of His teachings from those whose time was not yet come e.g., "Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given," Matthew 13:11 KJV). Nevertheless, by the sheer good will, or will of good, in some of them, Christ helped them - and they became true Christians.

"And from thence He arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but He could not be hid. For a certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of Him, and came and fell at His feet: The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought Him that He would cast forth the devil out of her daughter."

"But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs. And she answered and said unto Him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs. And He said unto her, For this saying go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed" (Mark 7:24-30 KJV).



Christ's avoidance of teaching some, while actively teaching others, was the basis for His "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes" as quoted below. Christ was directly teaching the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida (which were nearby towns to Christ's home in Capernaum, located on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee), but most of them rejected Him, while many of the people of Tyre, who did not have the benefit of Christ's more direct efforts (at that time, for that time) nevertheless accepted Him for what He was -- the Messiah. Non-Israelites of Tyre accepted Him as the Messiah, while many of His fellow Jews rejected Him.

"Woe unto thee, Chorazin! Woe unto thee, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon, which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment, than for you" (Luke 10:13-14 KJV).

Years later, those same Christians of Tyre welcomed the apostle Paul (many of the people of Tyre were Christians before Paul was, while Paul the Pharisee was still actually a persecutor of the Church -- see Paul's Ministry), and through the Holy Spirit that was obviously within them, warned Paul of the dangers that awaited him in Jerusalem. Paul was a stranger to them, as a man, but he was a brother to them, in Christ, because of the Holy Spirit that was in them all by then.

"Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again" (Acts 21:3-6 KJV).

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Sabbath Morning Companion

Nothing New in Politics

"There is nothing new under the sun," wrote Solomon. That's what I thought when reading Jim Bishop's book *FDR's Last Year*. Bishop relates some of the difficulties Franklin Roosevelt had with Congress as his Administration drew to a close.

According to Bishop, FDR's enemies painted him as a "rich man who had betrayed his own class with crushing taxes; a liar who had promised the mothers of America when he asked for a third term: 'I hate war! I promise you, your sons will not fight on foreign soil.' GOP leaders never tired of reminding the people that Mr. Roosevelt was spending \$312 million every day on the war and that it was 'his war -- he enticed the Japanese to attack.' Mr. Roosevelt had begun to prepare the nation for hostilities in June 1940 -- a year and a half before the attack on Pearl Harbor -- and from that time until the spring of 1944, he had spent \$168 billion on defense" (pp. 21 -- 22).

Change a few words, switch the political parties, and you could be reading about the current rancor in Washington, DC. Times may change and political parties may trade positions of power, but the story remains the same: Do what you must to win the next election, including defaming the character and motives of the other side. It was striking how, during the mother of all wars, politics was as usual—myths to the contrary notwithstanding.

Lesson #1 from this sordid bit of history (which is representative of the norm during our nation's wars and not the exception) is to understand that it is better to trust in the

Lord than to put confidence in princes (Psalm 118:9). The church will not solve the world's problems through the election of the right leaders. Good leadership is a good thing, but power is a temptation few can handle. The acquisition and preservation of power too often becomes an end in itself.

Lesson #2 is to ignore the ground clutter of chatter coming from the wells of Congress and the talking heads of network news. They have their own agendas, and truth is a part of that agenda only if it serves their purposes. Jesus said the truth will set you free. Your obligation of citizenship is to seek the truth, or else you will forfeit bit by bit your inheritance as free men and women.

Finally, lesson #3 is to heed the admonition of the Apostles. "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1 NIV). "Fear God. Honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17 NKJV).

Love them or hate them, we have what we have, and they are due our respect. More importantly, we owe them our prayers, even if we voted for the other guy. For ultimately, we're in this thing together.

—Lenny Cacchio

Lenny Cacchio lives in Lees Summit, Missouri, and is very active in the Truckers' Bible Study in the Kansas City, Missouri, area. The Sabbath Morning Companion is now available as a devotional and journal through the Website of the Church of God, Kansas City (www.kccog.org/literature.htm).

Profaning the Sabbath Day (Part 2)

by Jonathan Sjørdal

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do All thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of YHWH thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days YHWH made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore YHWH blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Exodus 20:8-11

(In Part 1 the author discussed what kinds of work are permissible on the Sabbath. Part 2 deals with the money generated from such permissible work. Editor)

Part II: The Money

As a Sabbath day keeper, if your chosen profession involves necessary work and you work in rotation with others so that periodically you work on the Sabbath day, what about the money you receive for working? Should you refuse to be paid for the work that you do on the Sabbath day? Should you donate it to charity? What could you, should you, must you do with the money?

One possibility goes like this: "If you work on the Sabbath day, you should give the money away. You're not supposed to work on the Sabbath day. After all, Jesus did not get paid to heal people on the Sabbath day."

There are not very many biblical examples on this particular subject. It appears that our Messiah indeed did not get paid to heal people on the Sabbath day. But we do have a few examples from ancient Israel regarding those who worked on the Sabbath day: Levitical priests, midwives, and the farmers.

When the inheritance land was being distributed among the tribe of Israel, the Levites were not given a portion of land for their inheritance. Instead, they were given the tithe of the increase from the other tribes. Their job was the work that they did in the service of the Temple and other priestly duties. Their compensation was a tenth (tithe) of the increase that was given by their brother tribes. It seems strange to our modern way of thinking, but the Levites were indeed paid for their work.

We know from the account in Exodus that the Israelites had midwives to assist women in giving birth. In Exodus 1 the midwives told Pharaoh that the Hebrew women were lively and delivered before the

midwives could get there. But this was clearly a ruse to appease Pharaoh. If the midwives were indeed not needed, why would there have even been midwives? Midwives were indeed necessary to assist mother and baby to have a safe birth. Babies are born every day of the week. Over a long period of time, 1/7 of the babies are born on any given day of the week, including the Sabbath day. Babies don't wait. They come when they're ready. We can safely conclude that the midwives in ancient Israel did about 1/7 of their work on the Sabbath day. Such work was not an unexpected emergency, for they knew that babies were born on every day of the week. We have no record of their scheduling, but it would follow the pattern that YHWH set down for the priests if the midwives worked in rotation, so that someone was always on duty, but they took turns so that no one would have to work on the Sabbath day all the time.

The other significant example of necessary work that was performed on the Sabbath day in ancient Israel was the work done by farmers. In ancient Israel, this was just about everyone. Feeding and watering the livestock was not something you could do yesterday or tomorrow. And even the vegetable farmers raised livestock to plow their fields and carry the heavy burdens. Plowing the fields could wait until another day, but feeding and watering the stock was ongoing work—hard work!—that happened every day, including the Sabbath day.

In considering the examples of the Levites, the midwives, and the farmers, we encompass nearly the whole nation of Israel. What did they do with the money that they earned for the work that they did on the Sabbath day? That's easy, right? "They didn't get paid for working on the Sabbath day." Or did they...?

When you raise livestock, a good deal of the work concerns feeding and watering. When it is time to sell the stock, the money a farmer gets paid is compensation for the entire process of caring for that animal, from birth to sale. If the farmer were to distribute the proceeds over the life of the care, he could figure out just how much he was getting paid each day for his work. Did the farmer NOT get paid for the work of feeding and watering that he did on the Sabbath day? Indeed, if this is so, did he also NOT get paid for the work of feeding and watering that he did on the third day of the week? The fifth day? The reality is, the farmer got paid for every day of work that he did, including the Sabbath day. There is no place in the Bible that suggests that the farmer refused one-seventh of his compensation for raising animals because of the work of feeding and watering the animals on the seventh day. Did the entire nation of Israel sin in breaking the fourth commandment by performing such necessary work?

Did the midwives not get paid for their work? We know that they worked hard, just as the farmers did, and that their work likewise happened on any (and every) day of the week. If their rotation fell on a Sabbath day, by what reasoning are they not worthy to be compensated for their work? The Bible is silent on what they did with their pay. There is no biblical evidence that the midwives had to or did refuse to be paid or that they divested themselves of any compensation they received on the Sabbath day.

What about the Levites? Did they have to donate the tithes that they received for their work that they did on the Sabbath day? Again, there is no record of such a donation or offering that they made for this reason. Where, in fact, do we get the notion that such a thing should be done?

The human conscience is a fascinating thing. When we think that we are doing something wrong, we have a deep need to fix the problem—to make amends and correct our wrong behavior. The alternative is guilt. Within the context of the discussion of what to do with compensation for work that is done on the Sabbath day, we must examine whether guilt has a part to play.

If you think that you are doing wrong in working on the Sabbath day, the natural impulse is to assuage your guilt by fixing the problem by giving away the money you earned in doing the work. After all, if you didn't walk away with any money, then you clearly have no selfish motive for doing the work, and therefore cannot be blamed. This does, of course, prompt the question: "If you think that you are doing wrong, why are you still doing it?" After all, it is better to be innocent than to be repentant.

If the work you are performing on the Sabbath day is necessary work, and you are doing it in rotation

with others, with a proper attitude, are you doing anything wrong? Is there any need to salve your conscience by divesting yourself of any compensation that you received for doing it? Buried deep inside the reasoning that demands that we remain pure from the taint of money for necessary work done on the Sabbath day is the notion that such work is wrong, and therefore is a problem that must be fixed. But where do we ever read about such a problem, or its solution? There is simply no record anywhere in the Bible of the necessity of refusing/donating your pay for necessary work done on the Sabbath day.

If a person is engaged in necessary work, in rotation, etc. on the seventh day and wishes to donate his/her pay for the day, let it be with praise and glory to our Creator, with a glad heart. Let this also be true on the fourth day of the week, or the sixth as well, for he blesses us every day. But beware the trap that says that only the Sabbath day earnings must be donated—for conscience sake. This is guilt-based reasoning that has no biblical backing whatsoever. In fact, the biblical record says something quite the contrary. Our goal should be to do that which is right, not to guiltily do that which is wrong and then try to fix it: "Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin" (James 4:17).

The fourth commandment is truly a blessing. We are instructed by our Creator to put aside the seventh day of the week to cease from our labor and keep a day holy unto him. It is a day of spiritual and physical renewal. It is a way of overtly honoring our God by giving up our own pursuits and seeking his instead. But in honoring our God on the day that he instructed, we must not lose ourselves in theoretical thinking. We live in the real world, with real people who need real help—even on the Sabbath day. When done in rotation with others, with the proper attitude, necessary work does not profane the Sabbath day, nor should it be a cause of guilt. We honor our Father best when we obey him and help those who are in need.

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The Great Chapter on Love

by Julia Benson

The great chapter on love, written by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 is undoubtedly one of the better known passages in the Bible. Portions of the love chapter are often seen in wall hangings or are recited at weddings. The ideas about love in this chapter are indeed ideas to which every Christian should aspire.

What many Christians don't understand is that the chapter goes a little deeper than pointing out how people should love one another. It is a source of divine comfort when we realize that the chapter reveals how we are loved by our Heavenly Father. In 2 Corinthians 13:11 Paul closes his letter to the Corinthians saying ...and *the God of love and peace will be with you*. John makes the point that humans can know God through love, and he even reveals that God is love (1John 4:7). The words love and God are interchangeable. Try it.

And now I will show you the most excellent way.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing (Corinthians 13:1-3).

Many have read this passage over and over, but have always focused on the verses that follow. But the first three verses in chapter 13 say so much about what should be in the heart of every Christian. Without the love of Christ we are nothing. If we don't have that love, then we shouldn't even pretend to be Christians. Christ freely gives that love to all, but to accept it, we as Christians have to manifest that love in our own lives, toward others.

Love is patient, love is kind. When we stumble over and over again, Our Heavenly Father kindly picks us up, only to see us stumble again. But He patiently waits, knowing that we will be together someday.

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. God loves us and wants us to show that love by loving each other. There can be found no envy, boasting, or pride in that.

It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. If the love of our Father in Heaven were rude, self-seeking, easily angered and kept track of all wrongs, we would have been goners long ago. But since we have His love in our hearts, we are loved selflessly and our sins are wiped clean when we ask for forgiveness.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. The truth, God's word, is a gift given to us. If we accept it, we show our love to Him. We show our love to our neighbor. We live in harmony with a community of believers, powered by the love of our Father in Heaven.

It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. What a wonderful promise!

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there is knowledge it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. When I was a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

This passage is extremely powerful in meaning. It makes clear that this life on Earth is nothing compared to the life available to us when Christ returns from Heaven. Even after accepting Christ into our hearts, *we are still but a poor reflection as in a mirror*, but in our new home in God's eternal kingdom *we shall see Him face to face*. Here on Earth we only know bits and pieces of what our Father in Heaven has planned for us. We can't even fathom the knowledge he possesses. But when we live with Christ in our Father's kingdom, *I shall know fully, even as I am fully known*.

Even as I am fully known. We are fully known by our Lord! It is easy to feel sorry for ourselves because we think that no one understands us or really knows our hearts and souls, but that is not true. We are fully known by our beloved Creator. What a wonderful feeling to know that someone really knows all of our hopes, fears, dreams, and reality. We are fully known!

And now these three remain; faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. We need hope and faith to survive as a Christian. But without love, hope and faith do not matter. God is love as stated in 1 John 4:15-16. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

Love is more than an emotion we feel toward our spouses, children, family and friends. It is how our

Father in Heaven relates to us and how we relate to him. That relationship is then to be offered to others as a witness that Christ, the son of God, is our redeemer, our counselor, our champion, our friend, and our beloved.

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EGYPT:

CHRISTIAN GIRL ESCAPES MUSLIM KIDNAPPERS

Laurence Wagih Emil

October 9 (Compass Direct News) – An Egyptian Christian teenager escaped her Muslim kidnappers last week hours after they had drugged her on a public bus. While holding her captive, they threatened to rape her and convert her to Islam if her family did not leave their Nile Delta city of El-Mahala el-Kobra.

At 10 p.m. last Tuesday, October 3, Laurence Wagih Emil, 15, escaped the ground-floor room where she was being held in Cairo's southern Helwan suburb while her captors were away breaking their Ramadan fast with an evening meal.

The girl asked Helwan area residents to help her contact her parents in El-Mahala el-Kobra, 100 kilometers (60 miles) north of Cairo. Earlier that day, El-Mahala el-Kobra Christian community had staged a demonstration, 1,000 strong, to demand Emil's immediate recovery.

Emil was able to call her parents with the help of Helwan area residents. One resident then took her to police, and officials escorted her to Helwan's branch of the State Security Investigation (SSI), Egypt's security police.

The girl's aunt and uncle, residents of Cairo, immediately drove to Helwan to locate her, but they were forced to wait at the SSI station while police met with Emil from 1 a.m. to 4 a.m. on Wednesday, October 4.

According to Emil, the officers were friendly and offered her a sandwich and a soft drink. But 15 minutes later, she said, she was unable to move though fully conscious.

"You should say that you took the bus to Tahrir Square [located in central Cairo] and met a guy named Fady, who took you to sleep at his house with his mother," Emil said police told her. "Say that; otherwise you won't see your parents again."

After Emil had regained use of her limbs, police had her sign a statement that she had met a male friend in Cairo and spent the night at his house, Compass confirmed. She was then reunited with her family.



"Laurence was in an awful state," said Helwan lawyer Nader Amrousi Saleh, who was with Emil when she signed the statement at the state prosecutor's office. Saleh told Egyptian weekly Watani, "We wanted her out. She's fine now."

According to Watani, the Christian girl's parents made similar comments. "My daughter is back unharmed. That's all that matters. We'll do what State Security asks us to do," said Laurence Emil's father, Wagih Emil.

Text Message Threats

While his daughter was held captive, Wagih Emil had received several text messages from her mobile phone demanding that he and his family vacate the city.

"Take the rest of your daughters and leave the city, or you will lose them one by one," read one of the text messages shown to Compass. "The girl [Laurence] is not accepting easily, but she will embrace Islam for sure."

According to Watani, one of the messages told Wagih Emil to close up his textile importing business to "give us a chance," indicating that the kidnappers were business competitors.

The message also demanded that Laurence Emil stop resisting and convert to Islam. "'If you refuse [to move out of the city], we could send her back to you a Mrs.' – a direct threat of raping the girl," reported Watani.

Looking for God in All the Wrong Places

by Brian Knowles



Last night my wife and I watched a charming little movie called "Wide Awake." It was about a ten-year old Catholic boy who was on a mission to find, and talk to, God. He was very concerned about the state of his beloved grandfather who had recently passed away. He just wanted to talk to God about him and get some reassurance.

Being a logical-minded little boy, he thought about who would most likely be in contact with God. To his way of thinking, the more religious someone appeared to be, the more likely they were to be in touch with the Deity. He tried the school nuns, a visiting cardinal, and even the pope himself. No satisfaction.

He tried other religions too. Nothing seemed to work. He kept looking for some sign that God was responding to him. Despite his best efforts, he detected no divine feedback. He was on the brink of giving up on God and becoming an atheist like his best friend, when that friend, home alone, had an epileptic attack. Our seeker, being driven home by his mother, who was a nurse, felt led to stop by his friend's house. He asked his mother to stop and she complied. The boy entered the house and found his friend lying in epileptic shock on the floor. He ran out and called in his mother who ran in and helped the downed friend. The friend, a self-professed atheist, came to believe that it must've been God who had sent his best friend to rescue him just in the nick of time. The idea that God might be around after all began to assert itself in both boys.

Then one day something happened that changed everything. A small blond boy who seemed not to be part of the student body, but who was dressed in the school uniform, walked up to our boy-on-a-mission and said, "Your grandfather is all right" or words to that effect. It was exactly what our hero wanted to hear. When he turned around, the boy who had brought him this good news had disappeared. The implication was, the boy was an angel sent to reassure our seeker.

What's the point of this beautiful little story? For me, it is that we are more likely to find God in our experience than in religion.

The Christian Agnostic

Back in the 70's I read what at the time turned out to be a disturbing book: *The Christian Agnostic* by Leslie D. Weatherhead, a British church pastor. It was disturbing then, comforting today. The reason it was disturbing when I first read it was because it shook the foundations of my belief system. It was one of those frighteningly honest books that stirs one to think twice about things normally taken for granted. After reading that book, I became convinced that I couldn't prove the existence of God to anyone, including myself. It's simply not do-able. I can reason about the existence of God in the most compelling possible ways, but I can't produce God through reason. I can't capture him in a lab and study him. God is simply beyond the grasp of science or reason. More disturbingly, He's also often beyond the reach of religion.

Don't get me wrong. I believe that there is far more evidence that God exists than that he doesn't. I also believe that in our time God is revealing more of himself as our knowledge of His Creation expands. We are seeing, for the first time, just how intelligent God must be; how vast is His power; and how wonderful it is to live on this tiny blue incubator planet tucked away on the edges of the Milky Way.

Convinced by Specious Arguments

I realize that my personal belief system in the 70's was embarrassingly simplistic and founded more upon the authority of a domineering church leader than on what I actually knew, and could prove, to be true. I had been convinced by a set of specious arguments that God must exist, that the Bible must be His Word, and that there were no errors whatsoever in its original texts. I also believed that I knew the essential truth about doctrine, and that what I knew distinguished the true Church from the myriad counterfeits that were "out there." I felt secure hunkered down in the midst of the tightly circled wagons of dogmatism.

Weatherhead's writings, along with those of others, blew much of that certainty out of the water. I began to see that many of my beliefs were hanging

by skyhooks. I realized that I was standing on shifting epistemological sand. Like the little boy in the movie, I didn't want arguments about God, I wanted God himself – and I couldn't find him in the hierarchy of the Church of which I was then a minister. I couldn't find him in the buildings, in the church college campus, in the church's literature or in its meager liturgy. I didn't find him in the feasts (Leviticus 23) my family and I attended for so many years.

Instead, I found religion – a poor substitute for God. I found words -- torrents, avalanches, and tsunamis of words. The words were often shouted with great thunderous authority. But when the noise was over, they fell lifelessly to the ground. People went to their cars and drove home, often feeling worse than when they'd arrived at services. It isn't mere words that we need. It isn't religious authoritarianism that we need. Nor is it mindless rote liturgy. All the driving to and from services, the standing up, sitting down, singing, and canned public prayers often yield precious little spiritual substance. Like the boy in the movie, what we really want and need is God Himself. Ultimately, the questing boy found God in his, and his friend's, experiences.

Three Ways of Knowing

Leslie Weatherhead, in his book, cited an observation by the 12th century English philosopher, Roger Bacon: "Of the three ways of acquiring knowledge – authority, reasoning, and experience, only the last is effective" (ibid. p. 79).

Authority can tell us what is true in its estimation. It can even insist that we accept and believe it. It can seek to coerce us into doing so; but if that "truth" is not verified in our experience, it will soon dissipate.

We can reason about God until we get a mental hernia, and all reasoning eventually rings hollow if we cannot take the leap into an experience of faith. Writes Weatherhead: "He [the reader] must pursue the way of argument as far as it can take him, and then make a leap of faith in the direction of the trend of the evidence, acting as though it were sound. Reason will take us so far on firm ground. But then there must be a leap in the same direction...Faith is not a leap in the dark, or, as the schoolboy said, 'believing what you know to be untrue,' or treading a road that is contrary to reason and superstitiously running in another direction. It is taking the road of evidence as far as it will go and then, with the energy provided by meditating on the character of God as Christ revealed him, making a leap of faith, only to land in a conviction as strong as proof can supply" (The Christian Agnostic, p. 79, author's emphasis).

When I first read those words, they were disturbing. Today they are comforting in their honesty. They ring true in my experience. For many years, I have been feeding on a thought originally offered by Stephen J. Gould: "Science simply cannot adjudicate the issue of God's possible superintendence of nature" (Scientific American, July, 1992). Gould was right. Science cannot put us in touch with God, but I believe it points the way to him (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:20). For me, the more I know about the universe and my immediate reality, the more I know about God. I'm convinced that God is giving us a broader and deeper revelation of himself through the discoveries of science. The challenge is to reconcile that revelation with the written one upon which we have so long exclusively relied.

Automobiles and the Universe

While thinking about this article the other day, it occurred to me that an automobile could be analogous to the universe. Years ago, when I was a small boy, my father bought his first car, a 1947 Austin. Dad was an engineer with an insatiable curiosity about how things worked. He laid out a large tarp in the driveway, and proceeded to take his new car completely apart and lay out all of its parts on the tarp. He checked everything out and put it all back together again. He now knew exactly how his new auto worked, where all of its parts belonged, and what they did. By such close scrutiny, my father came to understand that his vehicle was a manufactured product, designed to work a certain way. Yet, in examining this product, he did not find its maker. Its maker was outside the product – off in England somewhere. It was evident from a close view of the product itself that it was a designed, manufactured automobile. It could not have designed or assembled itself. It worked because it was designed to work.

Leslie Weatherhead says in his book: "For myself, the old argument which seeks to prove God's existence from design, if differently stated, is still convincing...it demands more of credulity to imagine that the universe was all a huge accident than to believe in the operation of a mind" (ibid. p. 79). My sentiments exactly; when I examine the universe – especially these days – I find it ever easier to take that leap of faith to the idea that it's all a masterpiece of intelligence and creation. My father could not imagine his Austin just happening into existence in his driveway. He knew who had designed and manufactured it, and how it worked. If something went wrong, he knew how to fix it.

My leap of faith is not random, haphazard, or arbitrary – I believe it is a leap in the direction of the evi-

sued. No room on the fence was available for sitting or straddling. It was stand up time before the high throne of Yahweh. Many failed the test and denied the Savior before men. But a strange thing happened. "Although the great majority of laypeople and many churchmen played it safe, the heroism of a few was a more potent public influence than the compromises of the many. Particularly notable was the bravery of Christian women. Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria, who barely escaped martyrdom himself, describes how a local mob, worked up to a blood-thirsty pitch by the authorities, seized the wonderful old lady Apollonia, battered her till they knocked out all her teeth, built a pyre in front of the city, and threatened to burn her alive unless she repeated after them their heathen incantations. She asked for a breathing-space, and when they released her, jumped without hesitation into the fire and was burnt to ashes."^[3]

The self-sacrificing examples of so many brave Christians drew the admiration of Rome's pagan populace and many were drawn to join such a demonstratively committed community of believers. The Church then experienced a tidal wave of conversions.

More Martyrs and Heroes

God gives us many true heroes to inspire and guide us toward taking stands for him and for righteousness. Take those three young Jewish men who choose to be thrown into a fiery furnace rather than break the first commandment by worshipping king Nebuchadnezzar's image of Gold.^[4] Or consider Esther who risked her life to save the Jewish people from genocide.^[5] Remember the example of Deborah, who when the men of Israel lacked the courage to stand against the Canaanite king who had been cruelly oppressing them, stood up and joined the battle. God made her army a "thunderbolt" and gave her a glorious victory.^[6] Steven stood up to the religious leaders of the Jewish nation and gave them a most inspired account of their national history and sins, and of their responsibility for the recent murder of Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He was stoned to death while seeing heaven opened and beholding Jesus at the right hand of God.^[7] The biblical list of martyrs and heroes is long.

Modern day martyrs are innumerable. There was Dietrich Bonhoeffer who so stricken with such great loathing over the plight of the Jews, joined a plot to overthrow Hitler and was hanged by the Nazis. And the German pastor Martin Niemoller, who in 1934 personally admonished the Fuhrer Adolph Hitler to cease his anti-Christian attacks, his crude infusion of pagan German mythology and his persecution of

Jews. He was threatened but would not be silenced. His house was bombed, he was imprisoned, and finally died in Dachau concentration camp.^[8]

Thousands of German pastors and priests were killed by the Nazis for resisting the crimes of an illegitimate and evil state. They stood up for something. They did not have rigor mortis. They were not prone. Their Christianity required them to not remain neutral. Sadly, they were a minority as many more thousands of clergymen and most of the German Christian church choose to go along with the Reich.

In the last century, more Christians have died standing up for righteousness than at any time since the church began. Hundreds of thousands have died in the last two decades in countries like the Sudan and China. We are warned that persecution will increase before an end is finally made at the return of Christ.

I know it can be hollow to talk of being faithful to martyrdom when such talk is made from the comforts and safety of my American home. However, the Bible makes it plain that if we are devout and self-sacrificing in our daily living now, God will give us the strength to pay the ultimate price should it ever be required. We should pray for safety, not martyrdom. In fact, we are nowhere counseled to seek martyrdom and are permitted to flee it when possible. But when faced with the sword, and fleeing is not possible, it is either stand up for Jesus or deny him.^[9] But we should not fool ourselves; if we are not spiritually standing up for anything now, we won't stand at that final test. If I am not a dynamic, moving, growing, and "doing" Christian now, it is unlikely I will have the spiritual backbone and will to pass such a test.

The fact is, virtually all of you reading this will never face such a spiritual showdown as emperors Decius and Valerian forced on our fellow Christians 1800 years ago. But that doesn't mean we aren't being tested because we are—right now, every day in every way. The test is this: love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength;^[10] stand up now and walk the Way of God; join in proclaiming his truth; take on his divine nature by becoming like Christ; and be full of love and good works to all your neighbors.

Which brings us back to the frighteningly serious condition I've called spiritual rigor mortis. This condition is the mirror opposite of standing up for the Cause of Christ and actively working to further the coming of the Kingdom of God. It would be healthy for us to give ourselves a private "physical" to see if we are rigor mortis Christians. We could ask ourselves:

- Do I stand up to myself? Do I deny my self indulgences; do I battle laxity, ambivalence, tolerance and casualness toward sin? Do I refuse acceptance of whatever the fallen culture dishes out? Do I pray for a loving, serving, and giving spirit and to be used of God for his plans?
- Do I stand before God in humility asking him to actively direct my life? Do I submit my will to his greater will? Do I seek the clarity of his judgment on questions of right and wrong? Do I manifest conviction on the things of God? Am I moving Godward in mind and character and love?
- Do I stand up to others either to serve or resist: serving others at their point of need; resisting evil doers who would lead me away from The Way. Am I bold to share my faith and eternal hope with those in my circle of influence? Do I stand up for my beliefs and for what is right? Am I willing to draw lines at major issues, at core values? Am I afraid to stand up and be counted for Christ in the presence of men?

Frozen in Time

There are Christian folk I know who are frozen in time with a set of doctrines. To them, Christianity is a nice set of “the one and only true doctrines.” Like a bag of heavenly golf clubs, these doctrines will allow the user to shoot through the course of life with a winning score.

But doctrines are not Christianity. Dynamically moving Godward, becoming like Christ, is true Christianity. Doctrines summarize truths of Scripture. They are important and some are more important than others—the “weightier matters”—as Christ clearly labeled them in Matthew 23:23. Doctrines are the bones that, rightly put together, help define what the body of truth should look like. But they are not the body, they are not God. One can intellectually embrace the right doctrines and remain a rigor mortis Christian, or worse yet, an enemy of God.

Having been associated with the Bible Sabbath Association for many years, I believe with deep conviction that the Sabbath is an important truth of God — a signal doctrine that points to the identity of God himself as Creator, and to our relationship with him. But I also can state with even greater conviction, that the Sabbath is only a part of the Story of God and being a Sabbath-keeper does not equate with being a Christian. If that is a truth, and I believe it is, we Sabbatarians will be judged on how we stand up for Jesus on all counts of Christian behavior, not just the Sabbath.

There is a danger to thinking one has it figured out doctrinally. Such thinking provides deceptive camouflage to unregenerate, self-centered living. One can “feel” right while “acting” wrong. If anything is plain in Scripture, it is that God will always judge us by what we do and how we act, not with our doctrine-set, our pretensions, or our Christian camouflage. A lukewarm condition in some respects is more dangerous than stone cold for it allows for easy self-deception of one’s sorry spiritual condition. Lukewarm is but a stage toward spiritual death.^[11]

God knows a stiff when he sees one. He can take our hand and feel it is cold. He can watch our Christian life and see that it is spent in the prone position. If you are concerned that you are not standing up for righteousness in every area of your life, concerned that you are growing cold or already there; that you are spiritually stiff, not growing and not moving Godward...there is hope if you want help. Not only can our Great God resurrect the dead and have them stand up and live, he can also resurrect a Christian with a case of rigor mortis.

The first verse from one of my favorite songs, Stand Up, Stand Up for Jesus, reads like this:

*Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Ye soldier of the cross;
Lift high his royal banner,
It must not suffer loss:
From victory unto victory
his army shall he lead,
Till every foe is vanquished,
and Christ is Lord indeed.*

There is no rank for immobile Christians in the Army of God. Join me in praying to our Lord for the conviction to become hot, mobile, active, and stand-up Christians.

End Notes

- [1] Richard E. Rubenstein, When Jesus Became God—The struggle to Define Christianity during the Last Days of Rome, New York, Harcourt, 1999, 18.
- [2] Ibid., 18.
- [3] Ibid., 19.
- [4] Dan 3:12 ff.
- [5] Est 4:12-17.
- [6] Jdg 4.
- [7] Ac 7.
- [8] Vincent Carroll & David Shiflett, Christianity on Trial, San Francisco, Encounter Books, 2002, 119-121.
- [9] Mt 10:32-33.
- [10] Dt 6:5.
- [11] Rev 3:15-17.

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is a worker of iniquity, or wicked, or a lover of violence, or a false witness that speaks lies, or one who sows discord among brethren, then God hates that person.

If we are not one of these recipients of God's hatred, why is it important for us to know this? It is important to know this because we do not want to misinform people about the nature of God's love. If I say, "Smile, God loves you" to workers of iniquity, or to the wicked, or to lovers of violence, or to false witnesses who speak lies, or to those who sow discord among brethren - people whom God in fact hates - then I myself become a false witness speaking a lie.

One rarely hears sermons about God's hatred for certain classes of individuals. That is to be expected, because the overall message of the gospel is the love of God as expressed through His Son. It is true that Jesus came into the world to call sinners to repentance and to save them. But Jesus' love for sinners will not stop Him from killing them and casting them into the lake of fire if they refuse to repent. When the Bible describes the Lord's return, it says that "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (2 Thes. 1:7-9). The first time the Messiah came, He demonstrated the love of God and called sinners to repentance. The second time He comes, He will execute the wrath and vengeance of God upon unrepentant sinners by melting the flesh off their bones.

How should we relate to sinners? Like Yeshua did at His first coming, we should demonstrate the love of God and call them to repentance. At the same time, we should not give them the false impression that God loves them unconditionally even if they remain in their sins. If a sinner continually hardens his heart and becomes a worker of iniquity, or wicked, or a lover of violence, or a false witness, or one who sows discord among brethren, then God will hate him. At that point, we need to be careful about how we relate to such sinners. We even need to be cautious and prayerful about how much help to give to a sinner who has earned God's hatred. King Jehoshaphat, a righteous king, agreed to help wicked King Ahab in a war. After the battle, a prophet rebuked King Jehoshaphat with these words: "Shouldest thou

help the ungodly, and love them that hate Yahweh? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before Yahweh" (2 Chron. 19:2). This verse makes me be careful about how much help to give to someone if I know that he is ungodly and hates the Lord. We are commanded to love our own enemies, but I'm not so sure how much love we are supposed to have for God's enemies. King David said, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? And am I not grieved with those that rise up against Thee? I hate them with perfect hatred" (Ps. 139:21f).

Lost sinners need to know that we live in a world of cause and effect. They need to realize that the choices they make have both temporal and eternal consequences. What they choose to do or not do about their sinful condition will be the cause of either forgiveness and eternal life with the saints of God, or everlasting fire with the devil and his angels. Telling an unrepentant sinner that God loves him unconditionally is not the Biblical model for calling hardened sinners to repentance.

Believers, too, need to realize that their choices have both temporal and eternal consequences. In some

Not only lost sinners, but also saved believers need to remember that we live in a world of cause and effect.

Christian circles, the people's view of Christianity could be summed up something like this: "To become a Christian, you go up to the church altar and repeat the words of the 'sinner's prayer.' You give Jesus permission to come into your heart and be your personal Saviour.

Then you have the option of deciding whether you want to be a carnal Christian or a spiritual Christian. You can be a carnal Christian and still go to heaven. But if you want to be a spiritual Christian, you'll go to church on Sundays, so you can be reminded once a week that you don't need to do anything for the Lord, 'cause salvation is a free gift."

It's true that salvation is a gift from God, but it is not exactly "free." It cost the Son of God His life. Because He paid the price of redemption, He can freely offer forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Even salvation operates by cause and effect. His death is the cause which produces the effect of your forgiveness. But your forgiveness, once received, should become a cause. Your receiving of God's gift of eternal life should cause you to want to do something for the Lord - not out of a need to earn your salvation, but out of gratitude for His amazing grace. If you are not motivated and inspired to do something for the Lord, then I suggest that you "examine yourselves [to see] whether ye be in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5).

Not only lost sinners, but also saved believers need to remember that we live in a world of cause and ef-

fect. For every effect there is a cause. Furthermore, it is important to understand that we cannot always know the exact cause behind each and every effect. Many of the cause-and-effect warnings in the Scriptures are not very specific. They are just general statements which tell us that obedience to God's commandments will bring the effect of blessings, and disobedience of God's commandments will bring the effect of curses. Some passages get specific, but in most of the warnings, the specific forms of the blessings and curses are not described in great detail. This means that if you disobey God's commandments, your disobedience will result in some sort of negative consequences, but you may never know which act of disobedience caused which negative consequence. So it's best to not disobey at all.

Things go on behind the scenes in the unseen realm of the spirit. The choices we make become the causes of positive or negative results. We do not need to understand the "Why?" or the "How?" of cause and effect. Joshua did not understand why God told him to march around Jericho, nor how this would make the walls fall down flat. Naaman the leper did not understand why the Prophet Elisha said to dip in the Jordan, nor how that would heal his leprosy. Yet both of these men got the desired effect because they obeyed. They obeyed because they had faith that their obedience would be the cause of the desired blessing.

Each time we obey the Lord, our obedience becomes the cause of some positive effect; each time we disobey the Lord, our disobedience becomes the cause of some negative effect. We may never know which specific acts of obedience or disobedience produced which results, but we can be certain that obedience brings blessings and disobedience brings curses. "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deut. 30:19). □

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"If men of wisdom and knowledge, of moderation and temperance, of patience, fortitude and perseverance, of sobriety and true republican simplicity of manners, of zeal for the honor of the Supreme Being...are chosen to fill the seats of government, we may expect that our affairs will rest on a solid and permanent foundation."
—Samuel Adams

Give Thanks unto the Lord

I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation is of Jehovah. Jonah 2:9, A.R.V.

The American custom of celebrating Thanksgiving Day in the latter part of the year originated with the Pilgrims of Plymouth Colony in 1621. The winter following their arrival in 1620 had been especially severe, and had resulted in the death of many of their number. So, as the winter of 1621-1622 approached, some of the settlers proposed a day of fasting and prayer. At this point a grizzled old farmer stood to his feet and rebuked his brethren for provoking Heaven with their complaints. He proposed instead that they set aside a day of thanksgiving to celebrate the bountiful harvest they had had. His proposal was accepted:

But the spirit of thanksgiving really originated many centuries earlier, in Old Testament times. Thus we find David thanking God in these words: "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness" (Ps. 65:9-11).

In the Hebrew calendar the civil year began in the fall, after the harvest, and was known, and still is known, among the Jews as *rosh hashana*, literally "the head of the year." The psalmist perhaps had this metaphor in mind when he declared that the Lord crowns the year with His goodness, His harvest blessings.

Thanksgiving should not be limited to one day in the year, however. Though doubtless it is well that a day be especially set aside each year to be thankful to God for His blessings, for the Christian every day should be Thanksgiving Day. The apostle Paul enjoins Christians, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:18). Notice: "In every thing give thanks." Admittedly it is not always easy to do this, especially when things are not going well. But God has ways of turning bad things, even suffering, into blessings.

If Jonah, who wrote the words of our verse for this morning's meditation, could find reasons for being thankful as he lodged in the stomach of a great fish, surely we can find things for which we can thank God.

Our heavenly Father is more interested in expressions of thanksgiving than in the most expensive sacrifice we can make for Him without a sense of gratitude. May God inspire us with this attitude today and every day.

Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 332. Review & Herald Publishing Association. 1981.

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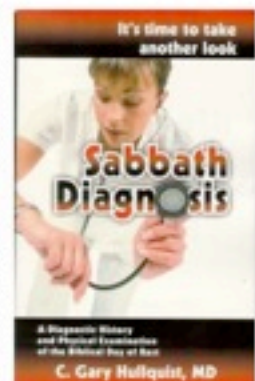
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- May choose one free book. Current choices: [] *A Thousand Shall Fall*, 172 pp, or [] *Directory of Sabbath-Observing Groups* (2001 edition), 246 pp., or [] *Origin of Sunday Observance*, or [] *The Ten Commandments*, 152 pp.
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- Members have the satisfaction of supporting the presentation of the Sabbath Truth in a non-denominational manner. Due to your support, we frequently receive contacts from new Sabbath-keepers!
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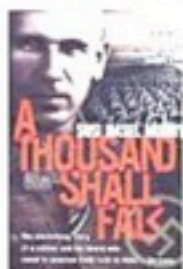
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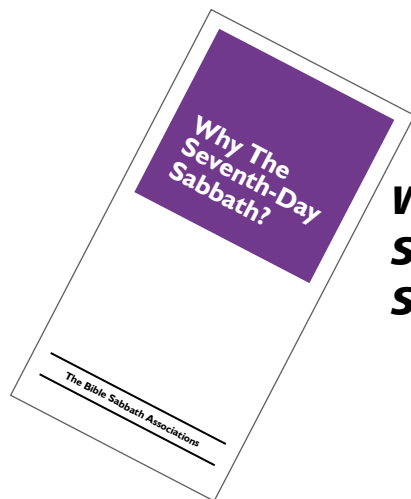


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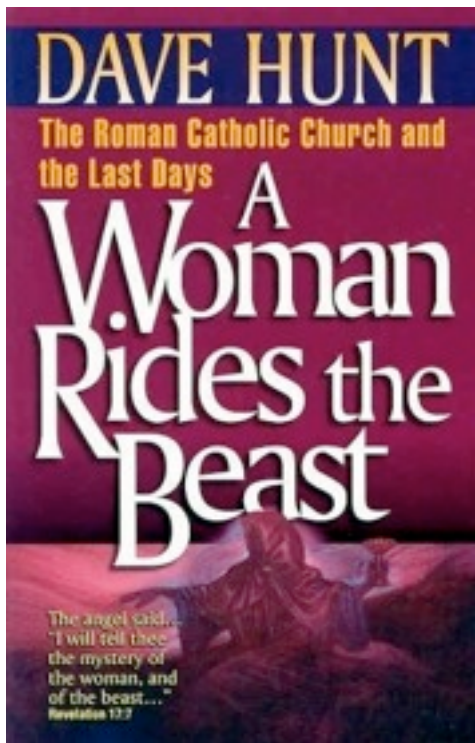
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