



### A fool for Christ

An ancient saint with modern ideas.



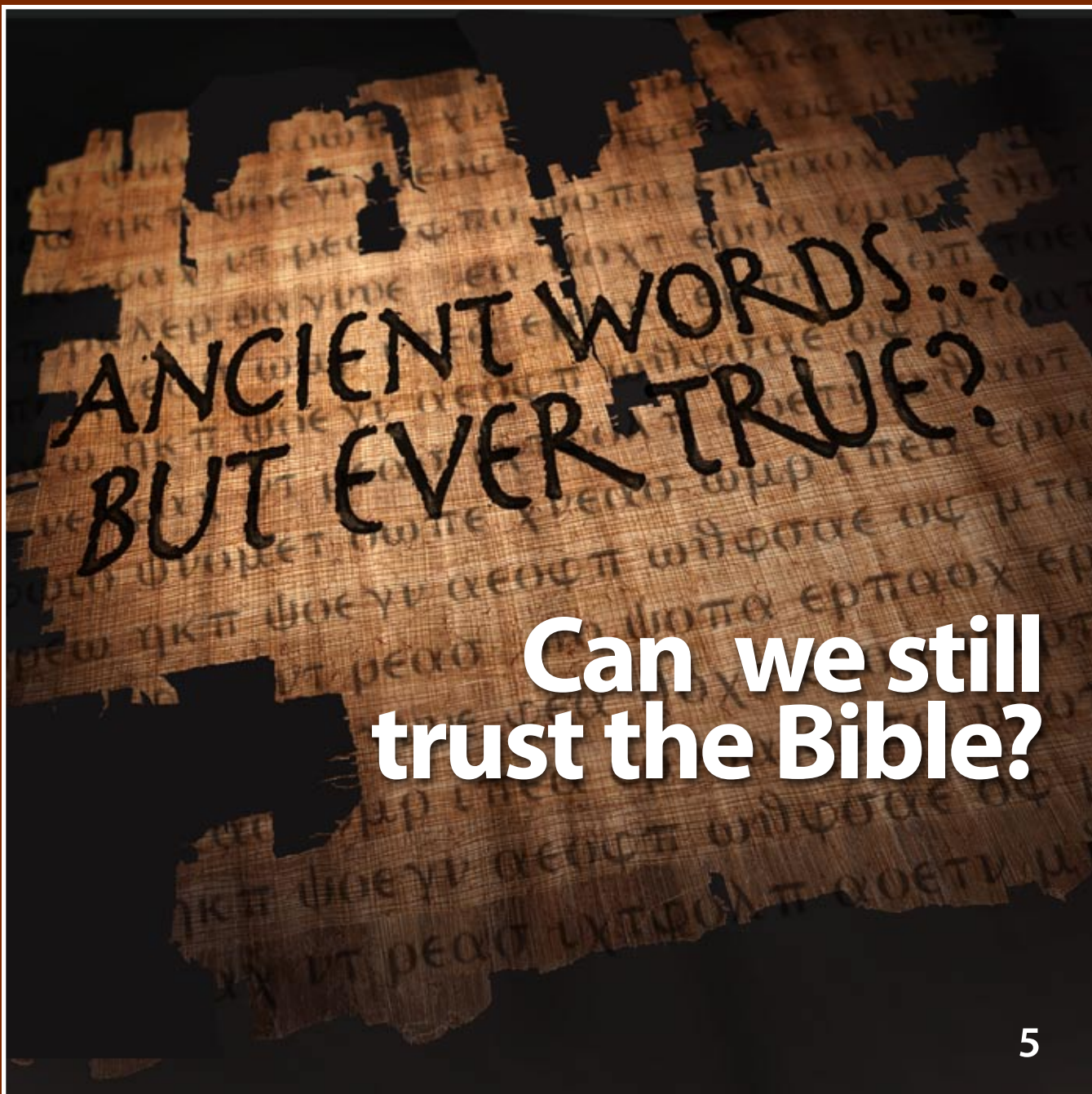
### Loving them to the end

Her patients were going to die anyway. But she would not leave them.

# CHRISTIAN Odyssey

October/November 2006

Exploring Life and Faith



5

# Letters to the Editor

I am excited over the quality and content of *Christian Odyssey*, the flagship magazine of the Worldwide Church of God. I eagerly devour its contents from cover to cover. It is a smorgasbord of spiritual delights.

I was touched and moved to tears by Dr. Lila Docken Bauman's article, "My father's living will." I asked my wife if she and the children could write an article when I passed and title it "Left Behind." Her response was, "What if I go first?" I plan to use the magazine as an evangelistic tool with neighbors, friends and family.

**Pastor Richard, Chicago**

When reading the Alister McGrath interview, I noticed your magazine implied that he was a "scientist" when he converted from atheism to Christianity, yet a check of his bio reveals he was around 18 when he "left atheism."

I realize Christian apologetics is a daunting challenge, but aren't Christians supposed to be honest, not manipulating the data? It sounds more impressive if a scientist converts to Christianity.

**Leon, email**

*But why should we assume that an 18-year-old cannot be a scientist?*

Great thought-provoking article on heaven. I enjoyed it. But when did the Golden Rule become "For God so loved the world..."? (August/September p. 5, column 1) I thought it was "Do unto others..."

**SB, email**

*Oops—you are quite right. Our mistake.*

"Unmasking male depression" (August/September issue) is an article that hits close to home. I suffer from depression and have for a very long time. It's only been about five years, or so, that I have come to understand what was wrong. I have gotten professional help, which has helped. I do struggle with the problem and maybe always will. Thanks for the information. I plan on sharing it with my doctor.

**email**

The article "Unmasking Male Depression," by Archibald D. Hart, caused some concern in me and prompted me to send out a word of caution.

He states, "A lot of spousal abuse could have depression as the cause or trigger." And later he states, "So the more you love your husband, son or father, the greater is the potential that he will hurt you.... The women involved need to understand that

the male's 'bad' behavior is coming from his depression, not himself."

As one who works in the domestic violence field, this set off some alarms. I would encourage the writer to also state that whatever the reason for the abuse, depression or otherwise, she must keep herself and her children safe. That is the priority. It is the man's responsibility to work on his depression issues.

**Dr. Hart comments:** *Obviously a wife must keep herself and her children safe. But not all depressed males are abusers. So a wife has to love her depressed husband (this is the context of this statement). Of course, the love must hold the husband accountable. My point is that one should not overlook depression as one possible cause of abuse.*

Letters for this section should be addressed to "Letters to the Editor." Send your letters to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA 91740-5005, or by electronic mail to [john.halford@wcg.org](mailto:john.halford@wcg.org).

The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space. We welcome your comments.

## I've Been Reading...

### **Christian Zionism: Road Map to Armageddon?**

by Stephen Sizer

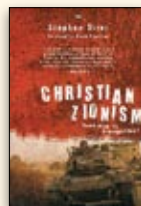
Reviewed by David Sheridan

The recent raining of thousands of Ketushya rockets on northern Israel along with Israeli air and ground attacks on Hezbollah strongholds in Lebanon, highlight once again the need for a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Stephen Sizer's timely book shows how key elements of the theological position known as Christian Zionism actually hinder the peace process.

Sizer, an English pastor, carefully analyzes the historical development of Christian Zionism, from its roots in the literalist hermeneutic and futurist eschatology of such notable premillennialists as J.N. Darby and William Scofield, author of the *Scofield Reference Bible*, to its modern proponents, including Hal Lindsey, author of *Late, Great*

*Planet Earth* (1970), Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* series and movements such as *Jews for Jesus*.

The political implications of Christian Zionism are profound. Adherents believe that there is no prospect for lasting peace between Jews and Arabs, nor that there should be. In their



**Elements of Christian Zionism actually hinder the peace process.**

view, to advocate that Israel coexist with Palestinians is nothing less than working directly against God's end-time design for the region.

This readable 280-page book is well researched, with a helpful glossary and extensive bibliography. John Stott commends the book as "a ground breaking critique of Christian Zionism."

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**5 Ancient words...but ever true?**  
Can we still trust the Bible?

**9 An answers in the dark**  
It's what I feared most, but I needed it.

**10 A fool for Christ**  
An ancient saint with modern ideas.

**12 Loving them to the end**  
Her patients were going to die anyway. But she would not leave them.

**14 Do we have the right books in the Bible?**  
Who decided what to put in and what to leave out? Did they get it right?

**18 The Gospel and Superman**  
How the myth became fact.

**19 Making friends with the disabled**  
When disabled people are starved for conversation, everyone loses.

## Features

**2** Letters to the Editor

**2** I've Been Reading

**4** Editorial

**8** One Pilgrim's Progress

**13** Bystander

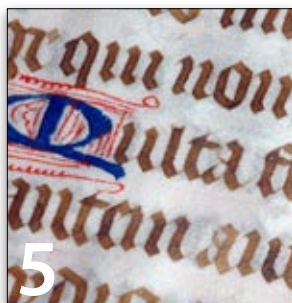
**17** In Other Words

**20** Church History Corner

**22** Bible Study

**23** Lectionary

**24** Hmm...



# Helping our unbelief

By John Halford

One of my favorite biblical characters is the unnamed man who brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus and asked for healing. The disciples had been unable to drive out the demon, and the desperate man asked Jesus directly:

“...if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

“If you can?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:22-24).



**“If we are honest, we will admit that there are times when our belief needs some help.”**

Now, there was an honest man. And if we are also honest, we will admit that there are times when our belief needs some help. We want to be so sure in our faith that nothing can shake us. Then something comes along and the cold, clammy fingers of doubt start clawing at our belief in God and his word.

For example, ever since *The Da Vinci Code* hit the headlines, the integrity of the Bible has been under attack. Although most of us realize that *The Da Vinci Code* is a work of fiction, and that there is no basis to the allegations of the story, the book and movie raised the profile of some awkward questions about the Bible. Questions such as, How do we know the Bible is the inspired word of God? How can we be sure it has been translated accurately? And what about all those extra Gospels and epistles? Why didn’t they make it into the Bible? Who decided what went in and what was left out?

These are questions most of us have never really asked, and they can be a bit unsettling and faith-eroding for some. It is tempting to just ignore the concerns and hope they will go away. But many people are made uneasy by these biblical issues that have been raised. Perhaps you are too.

So we need to talk about them. In this issue of *Christian Odyssey*, we will do that.

First, I must give you a word of warning. If you like neat, packaged answers with all the T’s crossed

and the I’s dotted, you won’t find that here. As they say on TV, turn the channel now. But if you want to face some important issues, and come away still trusting the Bible as God’s inspired word that is able to make us “wise unto salvation,” then I think you are in for a pleasant surprise.

The truth—about anything—has nothing to fear from facts. But let’s be clear what we mean by *facts*.

Science and mathematics can prove that two and two make four, and that sodium and chlorine make salt. However, not all facts can be established by scientific methods. Science can’t prove why you love your children, or why we find some things beautiful

and others ugly, or why some music is inspiring. We know these things are facts, but they are not subject to scientific proof.

The existence of God cannot be established beyond all doubt by the methods we use to prove things scientifically. I once asked a prominent Christian scientist what

he would tell a genuine seeker who asked him to devise an experiment that would help him know if God existed. He thought for a moment, and then said gravely, “I think I would ask him to pray.”

What at first might seem a cop-out is actually profound insight. God is not interested in being the result of a successful experiment. He wants our encounter with him to grow into a relationship. A relationship based on faith.

There has been a tremendous expansion of information about the early manuscripts and history of the Bible in recent years. These discoveries have altered our understanding about many aspects of the Bible. Much of the 19th-century scholarship that so vigorously asserted the absolute inerrancy of Scripture or its historical accuracy has been shown to be inadequate. We now have a much better appreciation of how and when the books were written and how they all came together in the book we call “the Bible.” The picture that emerges is more complex than we thought. But it in no way diminishes the Bible as the inspired word of God, a reliable guide to matters pertaining to salvation. There is nothing to be gained by denying the facts. And nothing to lose by looking at them. I hope you will take the time to read the articles in our special section on the Bible in this issue of the magazine. I believe that you will see the Bible’s relevance and meaning in a new way. ●

# Ancient words...but ever true?

## *Can we still trust the Bible?*

It used to be so easy, didn't it?

**W**e had the King James Bible, perhaps with the words of Jesus in red. There was a column down the middle of the page that had some occasionally helpful references, and perhaps a wide margin where you could add your own "inspired" commentary. Like Henry Ford's automobiles, you could have any color you wanted, provided it was black. And there was no question that this was the word of God.

Not now. There are dozens of versions of the Bible that come in a dazzling variety of bindings. Computer programs give us access to hundreds of reference works at the touch of a keyboard.

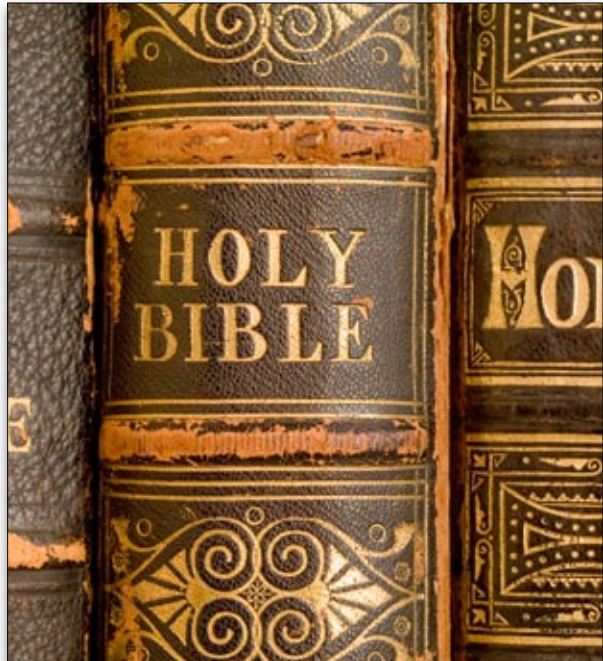
And we have discovered that answers to hard questions and explanations of difficult scriptures are not as clear-cut as we once thought.

Even more ominously, we have seen the Bible itself come under increasing criticism. Ever since *The Da Vinci Code* captured popular imagination, there has been a rash of books about many so-called Gospels, epistles and other ancient writings that never made it into the official Bible. Other writers claim to have discovered coded information buried in the original Bible texts, revealing detailed predictions of major news events of our time.

Many of these books are just opportunistic productions, written quickly to cash in on the wave of interest created by Dan Brown's novel. But others are well researched, and written by serious scholars, well qualified to offer their point of view.

What are we supposed to make of this flood of information? Has there been a conspiracy to keep vital information from us? Is the Bible just a collection of old manuscripts gathered together and preserved by human beings? Can we still trust it as the word of God?

We must not be afraid to face these tough ques-



**“We have seen the Bible itself come under increasing criticism. What are we supposed to make of this flood of information?”**

tions. And as we do, we hope to show you that there are answers, and that there is no reason to lose confidence in the book God gave “to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

### **But does the Bible contradict itself?**

The answer is yes and no. The Bible is written in many literary styles. Some of these styles communicate in ways that we are not used to in the modern world. They use analogies, figures of speech and symbolic language that don't immediately make sense to us.

If everything in the Bible is taken in a crassly or simplistically literal manner, there will seem to be some contradictions. Even the most conservative reliable scholarly statements about Scripture admit that the Bible contains grammatical irregularities, exaggerations, imprecise descriptions and inexact quotations. We have to admit that 1 Cor. 1:14, for example, is an error, for Paul tells us that it is.

Our ability to understand and to reason is shaped by our personal experiences and the traditions and ways of thinking that shape our ideas and worldview. People living thousands of years ago had very different worldviews from ours. Even today, because of different traditions and experiences, equally sincere people come to different conclusions about what the Bible teaches, especially in regard to the details.

The Bible is not always as user-friendly as we have come to expect literature to be in the 21st century. But the main, overarching lessons of Scripture are not really controversial. As Mark Twain once said, “It ain’t the parts



of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.”

### **So are you saying that the Bible is not historically reliable?**

Compared to most other ancient writings it is very reliable. But its standard of accuracy is looser than the expectations of modern science and history. Genealogical lists may be incomplete (Matt. 1:8; 2 Chron. 22-24), the length of kings’ reigns may be misinterpreted due to coregencies, narrated events may be out of sequence (Matt. 4:18-22; 8:14; Luke 4:38-5:11), predicted events may not be fulfilled in every detail (Acts 21:11, 32-33; 27:10, 22), etc.

All biblical statements are true, but some are imprecise and incomplete. The “truth” about a subject does not require that we accept every biblical comment as historically or scientifically precise. Most alleged discrepancies in the Bible are easily resolved, and they do not alter the essential message of the story.

Each part of the Bible should be evaluated according to its own usage and purpose. Its purpose rarely includes details of history and science. Some things we need to know, and others we do not. God is not primarily concerned with whether we understand astrophysics, botany, and chronology, and we err if we try to use his inspired book for purposes for which it was not designed.

### **Are you saying it doesn’t all apply to us?**

Some parts of the Bible are designed for a specific situation in a specific culture, and it would be wrong for us to take them out of that context and indiscriminately impose our modern situations and ways of expressing ourselves on them. First-century Christians were advised to pray with their hands raised (1 Tim. 2:8). Slaves were advised to submit even to harsh masters (1 Pet. 2:18). Virgins were advised to remain virgins (1 Cor. 7:26). Women were told how to dress when they prayed (1 Cor. 11:5), and men were given advice regarding hair length (v. 14). Similarly, people were told to greet one another with a kiss. These behaviors were appropriate in first-century Mediterranean culture, but are not necessary in Western culture today.

If the apostles could speak in our culture, they would quote the Old Testament in a different way, or maybe even use different scriptures. Parables might refer more to urban life, and advice about slavery would not be included.

The Bible was written *in* a different culture and *for* a different culture. Its truths were given with words and styles shaped by that culture. The fact that it is able to

**“The Bible is meant to reach out to people across time. From before the Dark Ages through the Space Age.”**

of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.”

### **So can we still regard the Bible as a reliable guide to all aspects of life today?**

Once again, yes and no. The Bible does not claim to tell us everything we need to know about all subjects, or even most subjects. When Scripture talks about the sun rising, as in Matthew 5:45 for example, its purpose is not to make a statement about astrophysics. When it calls a mustard seed the smallest seed (Matt. 13:31-32), it is not trying to give us a botany lesson. The Scriptures do claim to be a trustworthy guide for our relationships with God and with other humans. They give truth about faith, worship, salvation, morals and ethics (2 Tim. 3:15-16). But they do it in a way that can be understood by all people at all times.

Remember, the Bible is intended to reach out to people across the ages – in New Testament times, during the Dark and Middle Ages, through the 19th-century indus-

speaking across cultures, to address situations that never existed when it was written, is also a testimony to its abiding authority. Its timeless truths are given to us in cultural clothes.

### Isn't that encouraging a "pick and choose" approach to living by every word of God?

No. At least, not in a way that allows you to just accept the parts that you like and discard what you don't. But most of us use a filter on the Bible—a filter that in most cases we haven't thought much about. We claim the Bible is an authority for our beliefs and practices, yet we rightly do not accept parts of it as being normative for our life.

For example, the Bible says you must destroy your house if it has persistent mildew (Lev. 14:43-45). But most of us would not take that seriously. Common sense clicks in to allow us to place this scriptural instruction in its original setting and purpose.

However, we are not suggesting that you should routinely ignore the Bible and follow your common sense. We do not have to choose between such extremes. But Christians should think about the *kind* of authority the Bible has. Its purpose is to introduce you to the good news of the kingdom of God, and to make you wise unto salvation.



### So what advice do you give to someone who is reading some of these things for the first time?

Perhaps it will help to think of the Bible as a tree. Many Christians see that the tree is solid and well-rooted, and in that they are correct. But they may then assume that all its branches and even the smallest twigs are equally solid. They think they can place their ladder against any part of the tree without realizing that some of the twigs were never designed to carry such weight.

Small branches may support the ladder for a while, but when a strong wind blows, or some extra stress comes along, the ladder becomes unstable and possibly dangerous.

We need to begin at the trunk of the tree, and move out on branches only after testing them for stability. Some parts of the Bible are good for decoration, as it were, but not for support. They have value, but not always in the way we assume. They were inspired for one purpose, and we go wrong if we try to make them serve a different purpose. Never lose sight of the fact that the information in the Bible is there to make us "wise about salvation." You can trust it for that.

### But once you say that Scripture has limitations, don't you open up a Pandora's Box?

You can believe some things without having cast-iron proof. There are some things that you must accept on faith. Not blind faith—but faith based on evidence and substance, as the epistle to the Hebrews says. A person who is committed to God has a reason to have faith. But you can't necessarily lay out those reasons in a scientific way that proves to an unbeliever that what you believe is true.

But neither can those who doubt lay out a scientific proof for their reasons. An atheist cannot prove that God does not exist, or that Jesus was not resurrected. So don't consider the evidence of your faith as somehow being an inferior kind of evidence in comparison with the faith of the skeptic.

Personal experience helps us understand that the Bible has authority. This is the book that has the courage and honesty to tell us about our own depravity, and the grace to offer us a cleansed conscience and eternal life. It gives us spiritual transformation and strength, not through rules and commands, but in an unexpected way—through grace and the redemptive work of our Lord. The Bible testifies to the love, joy and peace we can have through faith—realities that are, just as the Bible describes, beyond our ability to put into words. This book gives us meaning and purpose in life by telling us of divine creation and redemption.

We realize that not everyone will be comfortable with that understanding. Others come to different conclusions about the reliability of the Bible. Some Christians believe that every word should be taken literally. Others claim that it is less reliable than we have described here. We respect their faith in Christ, but we repeat our belief, in summary, that the Bible is the inspired word of God, authoritative and reliable in matters of faith, worship, morals, and ethics.

### So what about those "extra-Biblical" Gospels and epistles that didn't make it into the New Testament? Why didn't they? How do we know what should be in it?

That is really worthy of a separate article. You'll find it on page 14. ●

# Let God be God

By Mike Feazell

**M**ay I ask you a couple of personal questions?

You don't have to respond out loud; silent answers will do. The answers are for you, not for me.

Here's the first question: Has your child ever gotten a bit rebellious, uncooperative or disrespectful?

And here's the second: Did you punish him or her? Remember, just a silent answer. No need to raise your hand.

Now let me ask you this: How long did the punishment last? More to the point, Did you decree that the punishment would last forever?

The very idea of it sounds crazy, doesn't it?

We, as weak and imperfect parents, forgive our kids for their "sins" against us. We might even punish them, but I wonder how many of us would think it fitting, or even sane, to punish them for the rest of their, or our, lives.

Yet some Christians would have us believe that God, our heavenly Father, who is not weak and imperfect, punishes forever and ever people who have never even heard the gospel. And fascinatingly, these same people call God the God of grace and mercy.

Let's think about it for a moment. Jesus tells us to love our enemies, and yet some Christians think God not only hates his enemies, but burns them mercilessly and relentlessly for eternity.

Jesus prayed for his killers, saying, "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they're doing." But some Christians teach that God only forgives certain people, the ones he predestined to forgive before he even created the Earth. Which, if true, means that Jesus' prayer didn't make a whole lot of difference.

## On our heads?

How often have you heard someone giving their "witness" speak about how miserable and guilty they felt over failing to present the gospel to someone who died? One Christian youth leader recently told a group of college kids a morbid story about how he met a person and talked to him, and felt an urge to present the gospel, but then didn't actually do it during their conversation. Then he learned that the man died, hit by a car, later that same day.

"That man is in hell right now," he told the

young, wide-eyed, Christian students, "suffering indescribable agony." Then with a dramatic pause, he added, "and all that's on my head." He told them how he suffers nightmares about what he has done, and how he lies in bed sobbing over the horrible truth that because of him, this poor wretch will suffer the torments of fiery hell forever.

I marvel at the way some people can so expertly juggle their faith on the one hand that God so loved the world that he sent Jesus, with their faith (yes, it takes faith) on the other hand that God is so shockingly inept at actually saving people that he sends them to hell based on *our* incompetence. Standing steadfastly in faith in God's power and love with one part of their minds, they actually believe at the same time that God's hands are tied to save people if *we* fail to get to them in time.

"You are saved by grace and not by works," they say (rightly so), and yet they somehow have taken a most baffling detour to come up with the patently anti-gospel idea that people's eternal destiny is determined by *our* success or failure in the work of evangelizing.

## Nobody slips through Jesus' fingers

As much as we humans love our kids, how much more does God love them? It's a rhetorical question—God loves them infinitely more than we are even able to love them.

Jesus said, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead?... If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Luke 11:11-12).

God really does love the world. And the salvation of what God loves depends on God, not how good we are at telling the gospel story. And God is really good at what he does.

So if you're carrying a burden of guilt about someone you didn't get the gospel to before he or she died, why not hand that burden over to Jesus? Nobody slips through his fingers, and nobody goes to hell because of you. (Who do you think you are, anyway?)

Our God is good and merciful and strong. And you can trust him to be that way for everybody, not just for you. ●





# An answer in the dark

By Marie Docken

I stood there in unbelief as the young man forced open the screen door and stepped into my living room, pointing a gun at my head.

My baby was asleep on the couch, hidden from sight, but my two-year-old clung to my leg. I told her to sit down by the door. She sat.

“God help me!” I prayed silently. “Save us from this man!”

Five minutes ago this guy had knocked, asking for a pencil and paper. I had only opened the door a crack, but that’s all he needed. Now he gestured with his gun: “Lock the door.”

My greatest fear was suddenly becoming real. But without thinking twice I grabbed up my daughter and yanked the door open. The man, all 200 pounds of him, lunged at me and tried to shut it again. I dug my shoulder into his chest and fought him all the way to the driveway.

“Okay, okay!” he finally muttered. “I’m going.” He ran off.

Police detectives arrived within minutes of my call. When I described the intruder they glanced at each other uneasily. They knew this man. He had mutilated several women in the city. He hadn’t yet let a victim go.

“And how,” they asked, “could you get the heavy door open and fight him off, carrying a child?”

I know how. We have a wonderful Father who gives his angels charge over us, to deliver us from the evil one. Wait!

Why didn’t God stop this man before he came in the door? Or better yet: Why didn’t he stop him while he was planning to harm me? God could have diverted his attention, broken his leg, given him a stroke, or indigestion—anything! But he let him come clear into my home. Why? I soon found out why.

You see, I grew up as an overprotected only child, crippled with phobias. I lived in terror of the dark, of closed spaces, of spiders, and most deeply, of being left alone and defenseless. My mother had taught me that God was always near and heard my prayers, but for years my phobias competed with my faith.

Then I found myself newly married to a man being called into ministry. He worked his office job all day, then spent evenings and weekends visiting people and attending ministerial training. I was alone most of the time. I loved my husband dearly, but night after dark night I suffered

miserably with fear.

Until, that is, the day the 200-pound attacker invaded my home. On that day, as I pushed my way past his bulk into the driveway, God reached in and lifted my phobias from my shoulders. Since that moment I have not feared being alone, or in the dark, or in closed spaces (although I still hate bugs). I know with all my “knowing” that God delivered me that day, not only from the man, but also from my fears.

Things happen for a reason when you are a child of God.

At what point did Joseph realize he was being sent to Egypt to save his family and thousands of other people? Was it when his brothers flung him into the pit? Or when Potiphar bought him as a slave in Egypt, or maybe when he landed in prison?

When David ran from his enemies and his closest friends forsook and betrayed him, did he think he was just having a really bad day? Or did he know God was with

“Why didn’t God stop this man before he came in the door?”

him? David wrote Psalm 22, which we now know speaks of Christ’s sufferings and crucifixion. In his aloneness and despair, did David foresee the reason for his trials?

Think of Job! He KNEW some purpose was in the works. He staked everything on God’s righteousness and the hope that his life would turn out for good, even while he was losing everything that mattered to him.

The uncomfortable truth is, though, that we cannot always see any clear “reason” for our trials, even after some time has passed. I have other stories to tell that fit that category. We all do.

But God is bigger than each of our lifetimes. When we utter a prayer, like a small child crying for help in the dark, God sets in motion the forces necessary to answer that prayer. It may be soon, or may take a lifetime, but God is patient, and he answers our prayers so that the results endure for eternity.

Trust him in that, and keep praying. He’s on it. ●



**Marie Docken** served with her husband Art in the ministry of the Worldwide Church of God in the USA, the Phillipines and Australia.

# A fool for Christ

By Sheila Graham

In my back yard I have a garden statue of St. Francis. I thought he would be right at home there with the birds, squirrels, rabbits and armadillos. (My son-in-law Bill says the statue looks like Obi-Wan Kenobi, but I insist the hooded figure is St. Francis.)

St. Francis lived in the 13th century. He wasn't the kind of teacher you would expect in a seminary classroom or a church pulpit. He didn't try to command a following. Actually, he was a strange bird, to say the least.

St. Francis took a decidedly literal view of life. For example, while in fervent prayer, he heard Christ say to him that his house was being destroyed and that he, Francis, should repair it. Francis looked around at the little chapel he was in, noted its dilapidated condition and promptly set about carrying in stones and mixing mortar to restore it. Throughout his short life, he was concerned about the repair of broken-down church buildings.

Little did he realize how his life's work would eventually influence a materialistic church to look back toward its Christian beginnings of love and service.

When I sent the idea for this article to the editor of this magazine, he asked me where I was going with this. That was a fair question. I could write about what one Christian could do with his or her life and how it



could affect the whole church, if you're still with me, let's see where this article is going.

Like the ancient prophets of old, Francis of Assisi acted out his faith. And, like those prophets, people thought Francis was crazy. Maybe he was. After all, he stripped himself publicly of his worldly goods, including his clothes, to prove he had renounced material things. He walked around in brown rags tied with a rope, fasted often and ate from scraps he was given or which others had thrown away. He preached to animals.

During the time of the fifth Crusade (1219), he decided it was better to convert Muslims rather than kill them. He left the Christian camp, where he had preached to the Crusaders, and entered the Muslim camp. The great Sultan Malek al-Kamil allowed him to return unharmed, and more than that, gave the Franciscans permission to preach the gospel in Muslim lands. Imagine that!

Paul would have related to Francis. Paul, who called himself a fool for Christ, wrote to the Corinthians: "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the

“His life's work would influence a materialistic church to look back to its Christian roots of love and service.”

could affect the whole church. I could talk about how churches can get themselves in such a shape that the quantity of members they have (think tithes and offerings) becomes more important than the quality of the members' spiritual life in Christ. Or what about those churches, ministries or individuals who have lost sight of Christ's commission by concentrating on sales of religious books, trinkets and other materials?

And, yes, I realize that some may be a little disturbed because I have a statue of a Catholic saint in my back yard. Now that I've stepped on a lot of religious

## *“What, me take a Bible course online?”*



**O**nline learning, although well-established in formal education circles, is often a new (and thus daunting) experience. But you won't need a technology degree to handle an ACCM course. We want to make it as simple as possible, leaving you free to concentrate on what's most important—the content.

So why not try it out—it doesn't cost you anything to get started. The first class in the Foundations of Faith course is available free to anyone visiting our web site. You can open the class simply by going to [www.ambascol.org](http://www.ambascol.org) and clicking on “free offer” in the lower left corner.

If you like it, you can continue on to Classes 2, 3 and 4. They are also free of charge. However, they are located inside our secure content area and thus require

a personal login. This is easy to establish. Just go to [www.ambascol.org/source/Members/cMemberInsert.cfm?Section=Sign\\_Up1](http://www.ambascol.org/source/Members/cMemberInsert.cfm?Section=Sign_Up1) and follow the instructions.

If you want to go all the way and complete the course with classes 5 – 7, it will require some administration work at our end. To help cover the cost, we need to request a nominal fee of \$50.

Should you not feel inclined to pursue the course any further than lesson 4 at this time, that's quite OK. We're happy to have had this time with you and you're more than welcome to log back in for review purposes any time you like within six months. Naturally, we're hoping that you will choose to complete the course, preferably for credit towards a diploma. But that is your choice.

Once you're in a program, a list of options will become visible to you, including learning in a collaborative environment with other students.

strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29, NRSV).

Though Francis may have been a fool, he shook up the status quo of Christianity. This one man made a difference in his world.

I'm not advocating that you (or me) run around naked or dressed in rags or that we give away all we have and then have to beg for our daily bread. Preaching to animals might not be too effective, either.

But, how's your personal religious world? How's your spiritual energy level? Are you coasting along, routinely going about doing what you feel is your religious duty, but with little enthusiasm? Is something missing?

How about putting aside your earthly pursuits for a while to spend time with your heavenly Father? My

daughter Tina calls such special time a God Day. I like that. For centuries Christians have set aside time to fast, going without food so as to focus on God. In our hectic world, we could also “fast” from television or video games or surfing the Internet for a day to make time to communicate one-on-one with him.

He might be trying to get your attention, you know. Maybe you need a spiritual recharge. Maybe your Christianity has been battered around and needs a bit of repair. Why not take time to find out? ●



**Sheila Graham** is a freelance writer and speaker on religious topics, including the role of women in the church, women of the Bible, the family, the environment and other Christian-related subjects. She holds degrees in religion from Azusa Pacific University's Haggard School of Theology and from Claremont Graduate University.

# Loving them to the end

By John Halford

**R**uby Jones seems in no hurry to tell me why she was on the front cover of *Newsweek* (July 10, 2006). This quiet, dignified lady was listed, along with some of America's rich and famous, as a person "who used fame, fortune, heart and soul to help others." Ruby doesn't have fame or fortune. But she does have heart and soul—and faith. And she used them mightily when Hurricane Katrina slammed into Louisiana last year.



Sixty-seven-year-old Ruby worked as a nurse at the Linda Boggs Medical Center in New Orleans. As the hurricane bore down upon the city, her family begged her to evacuate. But Ruby went to work

**“Ruby had kept her promise to stay with her patients until the very end. But the ordeal was not over.”**

as usual. It wasn't stubbornness or denial. She was responsible for several elderly patients living out their last days in the hospice unit, and she decided she could not leave them to die alone and uncared for.

For two days, as winds battered the medical center, Ruby stayed with her frail patients, encouraging and reassuring them. The flood waters rose higher, and the power and water supply failed. Doors and windows were ripped off. However, Ruby kept on



working, feeding, bathing and serving her patients, promising them she would not forsake them. During those frantic hours three died, but they were cared for until their last breath.

Help arrived on the third day, and five of the remaining patients were able to be evacuated. However, one remained in a coma. Ruby knew the patient did not have many hours left. Under the emergency triage conditions, this patient would not be evacuated, so Ruby stayed with her for one more night.

“How could I leave her?” Ruby explained. “Supposing she woke up from the coma—people do sometimes—and found herself all alone. How could I ever live with myself? I stayed, but I asked God to take her.” The lady did finally breathe her last, only a few minutes before the boats came again. So after four days, hungry, thirsty and exhausted, Ruby was able to leave the hospice. She had kept her promise to stay with her patients until the very end. But the ordeal was not over.

Ruby was taken to New Orleans Airport, where she joined the throng of dazed, confused people. Amid the chaos and confusion, and still in her nurse's uniform, she picked up where she left off. Somehow, she found her patients and also two of her elderly relatives. Scrounging what little food, water and medical supplies were available, she began to care for them. As the official relief became overwhelmed, she took on more and more of the elderly and infirm, who saw her uniform and called out for help. She bathed them, changed diapers and looked after them for several more days.

“My faith sustained me,” says Ruby. “I remembered scriptures like ‘all that I needed your hand

## The Synagogue Ruler's Wife

By Joyce Catherwood

(Matthew 9:18-19; 23-26; Mark 5:22-24; 35-43; Luke 8:41-42; 49-56)

I will never, ever forget the day I met Jesus. Our home was filled with family, friends and public mourners crying and wailing because my 12-year-old daughter had died in my arms. All throughout her lingering illness, I felt so helpless, with nowhere to turn.

You see, I had heard about Jesus and how he healed people, even raising a woman's son from the dead. I wanted to find him. But it would have been impossible for me, as the wife of our town's chief synagogue officer, to seek out Jesus on my own. I wasn't even permitted to walk the streets alone, much less search for a maverick teacher. This would have brought the ultimate embarrassment to my husband, Jairus.

And because Jairus was prominent in the synagogue, he had reason to think twice about going to Jesus as well. Pharisees, priests and teachers of the law from all around had labeled Jesus as a blasphemous trouble-maker. They wanted a reason to arrest him and stop his growing popularity. They even drove him out of the synagogue in Nazareth. So how could Jairus, a synagogue ruler, dare ask Jesus for help?

But on that horrible day, as he listened to our daughter's shallow, noisy breathing, Jairus could no longer restrain himself. Synagogue ruler or not, he had to find the healer. It was our last hope. When Jairus found Jesus, he fell at his feet pleading for the life of our only child.

Waiting for Jairus to return felt like an eternity. I wondered if Rabbi Jesus would really come to help a little girl. Most rabbis had no time for females, young or old, and viewed us as a distraction from the more important things in life.

As she drew her last breath, I held my precious daughter in my arms, stroking her hair, her clothes soaked with my tears. I screamed her name, begging her to come back to me. But she was beyond the reach of my voice. I carefully laid her on the bed and stared at her face for a long time. A servant left immediately to tell Jairus. It wasn't long before I heard men talking in the common room. A man asked the crowd why there was such a noisy commotion and wailing. He said my daughter was just sleeping. Everyone laughed at him. Then he told them to leave the house. I welcomed the quiet that followed.

We stood by with three of Jesus' disciples as the healer leaned over the bed and gently took my daughter's small hand in his. Then, with endearing affection, he said to her: "My little one, I say to you, rise up!" She began to stir. Her eyes opened and Jesus, still holding her hand, lifted her to a sitting position. She immediately jumped off the bed and walked toward us. I grabbed her and held onto her, tears of joy streaming down my face. Jairus wrapped his arms tightly around us both.

Not missing a single detail, Jesus then smiled and said, "Well, give her something to eat!"

Elated at this startling turn of events, we hurried to find her something to eat. Jairus and I were humbled by the impartial goodness of Jesus. With just one gracious touch of his hand, Jesus brought jubilant life into our home, the home of a synagogue president, showing mercy we did not deserve. ●

*"How could I leave her?" Ruby explained. "Supposing she woke up from the coma—people do sometimes—and found herself all alone. How could I ever live with myself?"*

has provided,' and they kept me going. I prayed for peace and confidence. I was tired and thirsty, but I was able to keep going even though I didn't sleep for several days. I felt God was working through me. I wasn't in charge."

Finally, she could do no more and was evacuated to a Red Cross shelter in Georgia. Her home was under water, and she had just the clothes she was wearing. Again, all was provided. "Total strangers loaned me a house and a car. Others gave me



New Orleans Airport during the Katrina emergency.

money to buy clothes. All my needs were taken care of," she says. "God never let me down. Not once. He provided for all my needs. Don't you think that is wonderful?"

That is the story that Ruby wants told. She insists that the real story is not about her personal dedication and heroism. The real story is a testimony of God's faithfulness and compassion, and of how he worked through a humble servant to bring some of his love to those who had lost everything. ●

# Do we have the right books

*Who decided which books should be in the New Testament?*

By Mike Morrison

In Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code*, one of the main characters says that the Roman Emperor Constantine decided which books should be in the New Testament. He supposedly "commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned" (p. 234).



“The canon developed gradually, rather than being based on one person's authority.”

*The Da Vinci Code*, despite its claim to be based on fact, is actually fiction—and so is the above claim. It's not hard to find historical blunders in the book. Let's look at one—the question of canonization, or the way in which the New Testament books were collected into one book.

A “cannon” is an old-fashioned weapon; a “canon” (notice the difference in spelling) is a list of authori-

tative books. “Canon” comes from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning measuring stick. A rough definition of canon is “the list of books that can be used in church to teach doctrine.” There were many books and letters written in the early years of the church. So why do we have *these particular books in our present New Testament canon or Bible?*

## A process

Historically, canonization can be seen as a process. It was not achieved by people meeting together to determine which books would be authoritative. The process occurred at different times in different places. No doubt, at first, the apostles and teachers in the early church told stories about Jesus, what he did, what he said, and what his death meant for us. In time, those stories were standardized and written down.

The canonization process, though there was nothing official here in the sense of an approved list, probably began in the first century. For example, some people may have viewed the Gospel of Mark as an authoritative record of the life of Jesus even before the book of Revelation was written. Or they were reading Galatians in church before Romans was written.

As traveling Christians visited different areas, they discovered more writings and said, “That's a good book—can I make a copy?” (Remember, there was no instant and complete communication as there is today and no printing press.) The books that were most useful were copied by hand the most often. “Writings that proved, over time, to be most useful in sustaining, informing, and guiding the church in its worship, preaching, and teaching came to be the most highly valued, and gained a special authority in virtue of their usefulness” (H. Gamble, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, p. 857).

Gradually, various books were accepted as Scripture, and only later did the church begin to draw boundary lines as to which books could be called Scripture and which were part of a collection of authoritative and helpful writings (that is, a canon).

Polycarp, who lived early in the second century, often quoted from the New Testament, but in most

# in the Bible?

cases he introduced the quotes with comments like “Jesus said,” “Paul writes,” etc. To Polycarp the words of Jesus had authority *as the words of Jesus*, not because they were recorded in an approved book.

Irenaeus, around the year 180, quoted the New Testament more than 1,000 times. He clearly believed that the books from which he quoted were authoritative for Christian teaching—and Irenaeus was “quoting Scripture” more than a century before Constantine. However, Irenaeus also called other books Scripture, such as the *Shepherd of Hermas*.

Clement of Alexandria, around the year 200, has over 3,000 quotes from the New Testament, but he doesn’t quote several of the non-Pauline, or general epistles; they were apparently not in his canon. Tertullian, who lived in North Africa about the same time, quoted from all New Testament books except 2 Peter, James, and 2-3 John. Similarly, Hippolytus of Rome did not quote from James, 2 Peter, 3 John, and Jude. Cyprian of Carthage (mid third century) quoted almost 900 New Testament verses, but he had nothing from Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2-3 John, or Jude.

In these writings, well before Constantine, everyone accepted Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, and the letters of Paul, but there were some uncertainties about the general epistles.

## Different sections at different times

The four Gospels were accepted early on, although some people were a little troubled that there were four different-but-authoritative versions of the ministry of Jesus. In Syria, Tatian merged all four Gospels together in his Diatesseron, but in the Western Empire, the Gospels were accepted as a group of four. Irenaeus even argued that four is the divinely sanctioned number.

The writings of Paul were accepted early on as definitive for Christian belief and practice. Although there was a little disagreement about which books he actually wrote, it was agreed that those he wrote were authoritative. Acts was also widely accepted, probably because it was written by Luke, the author of an accepted Gospel.

There was widespread agreement about the vast majority (20 out of 27 books) of the New Testament. The disagreements were about a few smaller books—the tail end of the Bible. Specifically, there were some reservations about Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude, and Revelation, and this lasted for centuries.

Eusebius recognized only one authentic epistle of Peter, and 2 Peter was rarely used. Second and Third John were little used until the fourth century, and were not in the lists of Origen and Eusebius. The epistle of Jude also had a mixed reception, perhaps because Jude quotes *1 Enoch*, which was rarely considered authoritative.

There were a few additional books that were occasionally counted as authoritative: 3 Corinthians, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Didache, the first letter of Clement of Rome, the letters of Ignatius, Barnabas, the Apocalypse of Peter, the Acts of Paul, the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas. Some of these are now in the collection called the apostolic fathers; others are deemed heretical. Some of these were widely recommended, and the extreme boundaries of the canon were somewhat blurred for many years. Even as late as the sixth century, Codex Claromontanus does not include Hebrews, but it does include Barnabas, Hermas, the Acts of Paul, and the Apocalypse of Peter.

## Criteria

In general, early church leaders looked at three criteria: 1) antiquity and apostolicity—whether a book had been written by an apostle or someone associated with the apostles, such as Mark or Luke, 2) orthodoxy—was the writing in agreement with traditional doctrines accepted from the beginning of the church, and 3) consensus—whether many churches in diverse locations were using the book. Although there was no formula for applying these criteria to various books, these are the kind of norms or principles mentioned when a church leader comments on whether a particular book is to be accepted or rejected.

Often, no reason was given at all for a book to be considered authoritative in a canonical sense—it was simply said that we accept this book, but not this other one. Some books were widely accepted because many people had found them useful from the time they were written; other books were not. The church fathers said little about the determining factors, because the canon developed gradually, rather than being based on one person’s authority.

Surprisingly, “inspiration” was not a factor at all, since that was a much broader and rather indefinite category. Even sermons were considered “inspired”; the fact that a document was inspired was not proof that it was also canonical. Everything in the canon was considered inspired, but not everything considered inspired was in the canon.

## Attempts to list the canonical books

The earliest undisputed list of books comes from Eusebius, in the 320s. “Even though he reported that some lists preceded his, including lists supposedly from Clement of Alexandria and Origen...these lists were more likely inventions of Eusebius which he constructed from his own tabulation of the references to the New Testament

Scriptures that Clement and Origen cited” (Lee McDonald, *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, p. 135).

Eusebius noted that the following books were disputed: James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Acts of Paul, Shepherd of Hermas, Apocalypse of Peter, Epistle of Barnabas, Didache, and possibly Revelation. Eusebius wrote at the time of Constantine, and he gives not even a hint that Constantine had any opinions about which books ought to be accepted. If Constantine did try to settle the question, he was quite unsuccessful. No authoritative list comes from him.

The Cheltenham canon (probably mid-fourth century)



“The council of Trent (1546) made the current list of New Testament books an article of faith, but only by a minority vote.”

omitted James, Jude, and Hebrews. Codex Sinaiticus (fourth century) includes all the modern canon plus Barnabas and Shepherd of Hermas. The Council of Laodicea (363) omitted some of the general epistles and Revelation. Athanasius of Alexandria gave a list identical to our modern canon in the year 367, but not everyone followed his list.

Canon lists were part of the council of Rome (382), the synod of Hippo (393) and two councils at Carthage (397, 419), but none of these councils represented the church at large. The Trullan synod held in Constantinople in 691-2 ratified the lists of several previous councils, even though they contradicted one another. Carthage had accepted all the general epistles and Revelation, whereas Laodicea had rejected some of them.

Rome did not officially rule on the canon until the Council of Florence (1439-43). The council of Trent

(1546) made the current list of New Testament books an article of faith, but only by a minority vote—24 in favor, 15 against, and 16 abstentions. But the Greek Orthodox Church certainly did not get its canon from Roman authority.

None of the councils *made* a book canonical—the council could merely affirm that a book had already been used from the earliest history of the church and that it could continue, in fact, to be so used.

Some of the Reformers questioned the canon, and “Luther’s lower estimate of four books of the New Testament is disclosed in the Table of Contents, where the first twenty-three books from Matthew to 3 John are each assigned a number, whereas, after a blank space, the column of titles, without numbers, continues with Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation” (Bruce Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 242).

### No more and ‘No. More’

What prompted the leaders to draw up a list of books considered to be authoritative for faith? Two factors may have played important roles: 1) heretics such as Marcion had their own list of books, and 2) fourth-century persecutors wanted to burn the Christians’ sacred writings while the Christians wanted to hide them. But exactly which books were they to hide?

Marcion had created his own abridged list of books from those accepted by the general church as being authoritative. In effect, he chose his favorites from an already-existing list of Gospels and epistles. The church

responded to Marcion’s abbreviated canon with, No—*more* than that. But to the Gnostics and Montanists, who wanted to add new books, the church responded with, *No more* than this! The fact

that Marcion felt compelled to create a truncated list or canon speaks to the fact that certain books were already considered authoritative for the church even at this early date—long before Constantine.

When Constantine accepted Christianity, he ordered 50 high-quality copies of the Scriptures to be distributed to ensure teaching uniformity throughout his empire. But he apparently had nothing to say about which books were in those copies. Even well after Constantine, Amphilo-chius of Iconium (in Asia Minor) rejected 2 Peter, 2-3 John, Jude, and Revelation. If Constantine tried to fix the canon, he failed.

John Chrysostom (c. 400) had 11,000 quotes from the New Testament, but none from 2 Peter, 2 or 3 John, Jude or Revelation. Although he may have seen a list saying that those books were canonical, the list could not make



him use them!

In the West, things were more stable, since there was a central authority telling everyone to accept the Vulgate translation, which contains all the New Testament books accepted today. Even so, more than 100 (out of 8000) manuscripts of the Vulgate include the spurious epistle to the Laodiceans.

### Authority today

Is the canon a list of authoritative books, or an authoritative list of books? Does the authority of each book come from itself, or from the fact that it is included in a list? Is the canon independent of church authority, or dependent on church authority? Probably the best answer is a little of both.

Many of the books were recognized as intrinsically authoritative; the early church leaders recognized that the books were authoritative even before anyone voted on anything. They were merely ratifying what was already customary. That was the case with the Gospels, Acts, and the epistles of Paul—the vast majority of the New Testament. On the other hand, some of the disputed books eventually gained widespread acceptance not so much on

their own, but because they were included in a list by various church leaders and councils.

The canon was determined by long-standing Christian tradition—a tradition that had been shaped by those very books. Practically speaking, we cannot add any more books, nor take any away from our New Testament canon; the vast majority of the church would resist any such changes. We basically have to trust that God has guided his people in such a way that what we have presents a

“Constantine ordered the Scriptures to be distributed across his empire. But apparently he said nothing about which books to include.”

faithful witness to the gospel and is an accurate record of God’s revelation to humanity.

As you can see, *The Da Vinci Code* has little connection with the facts of history. Constantine had nothing to do with choosing which books would be in our Bibles. For the vast majority of the New Testament, the churches had already made the decision (based on an existing long-time tradition of use) more than a century before Constantine. And for the areas of uncertainty, Constantine did not settle anything one way or another. ●

## In Other Words

# An elephant’s tail

By James R. Henderson

***Short though the elephant’s tail may be,  
he can still flick away flies with it...***

(West African proverb)

**H**ave you ever noticed how tiny an elephant’s tail is compared to the rest of its body?

Its size, however, does not diminish its purpose or effectiveness.

All of us feel like an elephant’s tail sometimes. Perhaps we think we are insignificant in the great scheme of things. But that is not how God sees us.

People sometimes tell me that they don’t have the talents or the training to make much difference. Congregational leaders of small churches sometimes think they can do little for God since they lack the structures and programs described in church growth books.

David was a small young man faced with a giant of a problem. King Saul offered David the latest in fine armor and weaponry. But David did the job with just a few small stones and a simple sling.

Sometimes the greatest work is done by the least impressive



people with the simplest tools. No matter how little you think you are or how little you think you have, God can use you for his great purpose. ●

# The Gospel and *Superman*

By Neil Earle

“don't think this world needs Superman. This world doesn't need a savior,” Lois Lane (Kate Bosworth) tells the Man of Steel in the latest remake of one of America's most popular fairy tales.

Later on, suspended high over Metropolis, Superman (Brandon Routh) tells Lois quite feelingly, “You wrote, ‘The world doesn't need a savior,’ but every day I hear people crying for one.”

This is not the “wow” moment pastor-journalists such as myself might seize upon as a chance to pontificate, either as a recommendation for or against the movie. I'm still partial to the 1978 Christopher Reeve version where the early details are so convincing, set as they are in breathtakingly beautiful rural Alberta, that you almost believe it.

No, as a longtime Superman fan from those boyhood DC Comics days of the 1950s, I am not surprised when I hear such dialogue. Fact is, a fellow student and I offended a group of our colleagues at a seminary one day when we jokingly pointed out some of the parallels between the gospel and the

This is why I was amused when a Christian book appeared in the late 1970s, *The Gospel According to Superman*. I couldn't help but chuckle: “They beat me to it!”

Superman is a work of pop culture—one of pop culture's classic imaginative recreations of a standard myth. Yet even pop culture, which typically deals in boringly predictable stereotypes, can on occasion touch on some universal and enduring themes. The fact is we *are* all looking for a Savior. Which is why hero figures still sell. Something inside us will shell out money for a tale where genuine goodness exists and where good wins in the end.

During his 1980s television series, “The Power of Myth,” Bill Moyers asked the cultural critic Joseph Campbell why the same stories keep repeating—tales of heroism and nobility, striving and self-sacrifice, trying to rescue the damsel, the city, the group. Campbell answered candidly, “Because these are the only themes worth writing about.”

C.S. Lewis once advanced a similar concept. With Christianity, Lewis argued, the Myth became Fact. What human beings have always longed for, have always hoped for, still yearn and even pray for—the possibility of meaning, of a person who is on our side, that the universe is not apathetic, but that love and caring and purpose exists at its core—that, said Lewis, is precisely what the gospel

“Human beings have always longed for a person who is on our side.”

Man of Steel:

- A being with extra-earthly origins here to do good,
- a father (Jor-el) with “el” in his name, the Hebrew word for God, perhaps being traced to a term creators Seigel and Schuster heard in the synagogue,
- the double identity, “meek” Clark Kent possessing super powers he could use at will, paralleling perhaps the humble carpenter from Nazareth working amazing miracles with the power of God,
- the evil, relentless enemy, Lex Luthor, perhaps a type of Satan with Kryptonite as a stand-in for temptation and sin.

You don't have to be a genius to be able to continue the set.

is all about. It is the central story of our existence, the one on which all the other child-like replicas are based. Or, in the words of 2 Timothy 1:9-10, we need the caring God “who has saved us and called us to a holy life.... This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time [yes, before even Krypton exploded!] but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who has *destroyed death* and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”

There it is. In the gospel, the Myth became Fact and Truth and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory. No wonder the human imagination keeps reinventing this Hero Story. It's the only thing worth writing about. •

# Making friends with the disabled

By April Hottle

**W**e all have things we want to say and ideas we'd like to share, and we love it when someone listens to us.

With that in mind, I'd like to help you meet some new acquaintances—people who are all around you, but whom you may have been overlooking. They are the deaf, the blind, people with speech problems, those confined to a wheelchair or disabled in some other way. Most of us are always polite to disabled people, but we may be reluctant or fearful to take the time to really talk to them.

Disabled people are often starved for conversation. Behind their disabilities are interesting personalities with valuable experiences to share. But many of them are trapped behind the social barriers that we unconsciously tend to erect around them. I want to encourage you to break down those barriers, to learn to talk—really talk—with people who are in some way disabled. You may find it a little awkward at first, but I promise you it is worth the effort to get past the initial reservation.

## Here are some tips to help you get started:

- When having a conversation with a deaf person who uses sign language, remember that they “hear” you by watching their interpreter. It is tempting to talk back to the interpreter. Don't do this. Talk directly to the deaf person even though he or she is not looking at you.
- Don't feel you have to “dumb things down.” Sign language is a very sophisticated form of communication and it is possible to communicate everything you want to say. Relax and let the interpreter convey your meaning.
- If there is no interpreter, use a pen and paper. This might seem laborious, but it can be a lot of fun. Just relax and be patient.
- If the deaf person can lipread, speak clearly and make sure they can see your lips move. You'd be sur-

prised how often we obscure their view with gestures in the course of a normal conversation.

- Don't let a wheelchair get between you and a new friend. But remember it is tiring for them to have to look up all the time. Pull up a chair or sit on a nearby step so you can be on the same eye level. (Have you ever noticed that children often feel quite natural talking to people in wheelchairs?)

- Most blind people can hear perfectly well. So there is no need to speak loudly or v-e-r-y d-i-s-t-i-n-c-t-l-y to them.

- Don't pet a guide dog. It has a job to do.
- It can be difficult communicating with people who have speech impediments (like stammering). But remember—they have dealt with this for years. They don't mind being asked to repeat themselves.

Again, be patient. Don't be too quick to give up on a conversation. They are pleased that someone is interested, and you may help them develop more confidence in their ability to express themselves. Their feelings of self-worth will grow.

Lawrence Siegel, Founder and Director of the National Deaf Education Project, states, “The need and right to communicate is the most fundamental of human rights. To foster communication is to reveal all the possibilities of life.”

Remember—people with disabilities are only *disabled*—not *unable*. Most people with disabilities are quite capable of—and want to—carry on a normal conversation with you. So why not gather up your nerve, think of a good conversation starter and approach the next blind, deaf or otherwise disabled person with a smile? It could change both your lives. •

**April Hottle**, a NAD III, EIPA 4.2 certified interpreter, has worked in the mainstream elementary, middle and high school settings since 1994. She is the wife of Scott Hottle, who is both a mainstream Deaf and Hard of Hearing teacher and an ASL Instructor on the college level. She has two children: a daughter, Laken, who is 15, and a son, Luke, who is 12. Both Scott and Luke are deaf.



# William Tyndale and the birth of the English Bible

By Paul Kroll

**O**n October 6, 1536, Englishman William Tyndale (c.1494-1536) was strangled by the civil executioner in Belgium and his dead body was burned at the stake. His crime? Tyndale had translated the New Testament and major portions of the Old Testament from the original languages into English so that all English-speaking Christians could read the Scriptures in their own tongue.

## Persecution and Bible burning

In our time, we are privileged to have access to a wide variety of Bible translations in English. The idea that a Bible translator could be hunted down like a criminal and his Bible translation burned and destroyed seems shocking.

Why did such a tragedy happen? Let's briefly explore the religious-political situation in England between 1380 and the 1530s for the answer.

We begin with the first English version of the Bible, translated and published in 1380 by John Wycliffe (c. 1330-1384).<sup>1</sup> An Oxford theologian, Wycliffe was a severe critic of what he believed was a corrupt Church. He hoped that people could be called back to a more biblical faith, and for this to happen he was convinced that they needed to read the Bible in their own language.

By producing a translation, Wycliffe ran afoul of Church authorities. The few Wycliffe Bible copies in existence were banned by a synod of clergy in Oxford in 1408. In fact, the edict was issued against any unauthorized translation of the Bible into English.

Wycliffe was pronounced a heretic and was called "a son of the old serpent, forerunner and disciple of Antichrist" by the English Archbishop.<sup>2</sup> In 1415, the Church Council of Constance condemned Wycliffe's writings and ordered his bones to be dug out of the ground and to be burned.

We can now begin to understand why Tyndale and his Bible translation would also not be appreciated. Church authorities of the time seemed to take a dim view of Christian folk having the Bible in their own tongue. In the words of Church historian Philip Schaff, "Down to the very end of its history, the Medieval Church gave no official encouragement to the circulation of the Bible among the laity. On the contrary, it uniformly set itself against it."<sup>3</sup>

## The Protestant Reformation begins

Tyndale would obviously be in danger of the Church hierarchy solely on the basis of his producing an unauthorized English translation. However, Tyndale had two strikes against him because he was also enmeshed in the Protestant Reformation, which was in full swing by the time he completed his New Testament in English in 1526. The first shot of the Reformation had been fired nine years earlier, when Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517. (Luther translated the New Testament into German in 1522.)

Tyndale had thrown in his lot with the Reformers and was highly critical of the Church structure in England. We could concede that the established church in England had no real case for objecting to a Bible in English, except perhaps on the traditional view that it was unhealthy for people to actually read the Bible for themselves. However, church officials also objected to the virulent commentary that Tyndale's New Testament contained. This gave the high clergy the rationale to condemn Tyndale and seize copies of his translation.

## A determined Tyndale

Tyndale was aware of the dangers of embarking on the translation project he was contemplating. However, he was convinced that the common people must be able to read the Bible in order to be called back to the biblical gospel. In one debate with a cleric, he vowed that if God spared his life, he would see to it that the plowboy would know more about Scripture than untutored priests.

Tyndale first approached Bishop Cuthbert Tunstall (or Tonstall) of London in 1523 to request permission to translate the Bible into English. He hoped that the bishop would both authorize his translation work and also provide him with a residential chaplaincy so he could support himself financially during his project. The bishop denied both requests and suggested Tyndale look for employment elsewhere.

The next year Tyndale decided to go to the Continent, where with the support of a group of British merchants, he completed his translation of the New Testament. Tyndale found a printer in Cologne, but opponents raided the printing establishment. Escap-



ing with the pages that were already printed, he headed to Worms, Germany, where his full New Testament in English was printed in 1526. The first printing of 6,000 copies was then smuggled into England.

Church officials in England, especially in London, did everything they could to intercept copies of Tyndale's New Testament and destroy them. But copies kept appearing,

## From the Tyndale Bible:

*In the begynnyng God created heaven and erth. The erth was voyde and emptie, ad darcknesse was vpon the depe, an the spirite of god moved vpon the water ...*

to the chagrin of Bishop Tunstall. He hit upon the idea of buying up as many copies as possible within his diocese and then destroying them. Once he accomplished his aim, the bishop held a public burning of these New Testament copies at St. Paul's cathedral.

Despite this campaign against Tyndale's New Testament, new copies kept appearing in England. Tunstall then conceived of a plan to buy up large numbers of copies on the Continent before they made their way to England and then destroy these as well. The bishop made an agreement with a merchant in Antwerp, Belgium, Augustine Packington, to buy all of Tyndale's remaining printed New Testaments.

Tyndale was made privy to this plot and readily agreed to sell the copies. He would use the money he received to publish a new edition and have even more copies to distribute. The bishop's plot was foiled. In the words of one Edward Halle, a chronicler of the times: "And so forward went the bargain: the bishop had the books, Packington had the thanks, and Tyndale had the money."<sup>4</sup>

## More translation, opposition and Tyndale's death

Meanwhile, Tyndale traveled to Antwerp, Belgium, where he began translating the Old Testament into English. By 1530, he had completed and published the English translation from the Hebrew of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament.

Tyndale is also considered to have translated the historical Old Testament books from Joshua to 2 Chronicles,

though his translation did not appear in his lifetime. As Tyndale was involved in the theological disputes of the day and because he was hounded by those seeking to capture him, he was unable to complete the translation of the entire Old Testament.

Tyndale's second edition of the New Testament was finished in 1534. It was his definitive work, and it is this edition that served as the basis of the 1611 King James Authorized Version.

As Tyndale worked in Antwerp, Belgium, the agents of King Henry VIII and other opponents were scouring Europe, hoping to find and capture him. Tyndale was betrayed by a fellow English-

## Genesis 1:1-2

man, kidnapped and arrested on May 21, 1535. He was incarcerated in a Belgian fortress and eventually brought to trial for heresy and found guilty. The verdict condemning him to death came in August 1536. On October 6 of the same year he was executed at Vilvorde, Belgium.

Tyndale's final prayer, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes," is said to have been directed to English King Henry VIII (1491-1547). His prayer was a hope that the king would allow copies of the Bible in English to be circulated. Tyndale's prayer had already been answered. An English version of the Bible that drew on his translation work was in circulation before his death. Three years after Tyndale's death, Henry required every English parish church to make a copy of the English Bible available to parishioners.

In the biblical books that Tyndale translated, perhaps up to 90 percent of his wording is found in the King James Authorized Version and the Revised Standard Version. Where the 1611 Authorized Version departed from Tyndale's translation, later revisers of this version often returned to it. For his pioneering work of translation, William Tyndale is considered the "Father of the English Bible." •

*November 19-26 is National Bible Week, which is celebrated each year from Sunday to Sunday of Thanksgiving week.<sup>5</sup> This is a timely opportunity to recall the struggles of individuals such as Wycliffe and Tyndale who suffered grave injustices to help make the Bible available to people in the English language and to reform the Church. It is also an appropriate time to remember that many people around the world do not yet have a Bible in their own language.*

**1** Wycliffe's translation was made before the invention of moveable type and the printing press. All copies of his Bible had to be written out by hand. Also, his version was not a translation of the original languages in which the books of the Bible were first written.

**2** *A General Introduction to the Bible*, David Ewert, page 184.

**3** Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. vi, page 722.

**4** From Halle's 1548 chronicle of England from Henry IV to Henry VIII in *History of the English Bible*, F. F. Bruce, page 38.

**5** The National Bible Week celebration in 2006 is the 65th, and is sponsored by the Laymen's National Bible Association. The week-long activity began in 1941, when then President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a Presidential message in support of the event.

# Saved by God's mercy

## A study of Titus 3

By Mike Morrison

**P**aul left Titus on the island of Crete to organize the newly planted churches there. But Titus was not a permanent pastor—he would soon have to move on. What was he supposed to teach on this temporary assignment? Paul gives some final advice in chapter 3.

### Doing good is good— but not good enough

“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good” (v. 1). As Paul explained in chapter 2, good behavior puts the gospel in a good light. Although the gospel says that our Lord is Jesus Christ (not Caesar), we do not want officials to think that the gospel tells people to disrupt society.

Christians should “slander no one,” Paul says. “Be peaceable and considerate, and...show true humility toward all” (v. 2). For many believers, Paul was asking for a big change in their behavior. He explains in verse 3: “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.”

In some ways this list is a mirror image of the good qualities Paul wants Titus to teach. Be obedient, even though you used to be disobedient. Be peaceable, even though you used to hate one another. We were once foolish and ill-tempered, Paul says—implying that we are not that way anymore.

What caused the change in our lives? It was Jesus. “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (verses 4-5). God’s love appeared to us in the form of Jesus (Rom. 5:8), and he saved us not because we deserved it, but because of his mercy and grace.

We were not living a righteous life, but even if we were, those righteous things would not be good enough to save us. We are saved by God’s mercy, not by anything we could ever do to earn it.

“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” He did not save us through a physical washing, but by a spiritual washing and renewal. The word “washing” is an allusion to baptism, suggesting that our physical baptism sym-

bolizes the rebirth that comes from the Holy Spirit.

God poured the Holy Spirit “on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (verses 6-7). We are saved by God the Father, working through the Son and Holy Spirit.

We are justified by grace—put right with God—as his gift to us (and as Paul explains elsewhere, we receive it by faith). The result is that we become inheritors of eternal life, which gives us tremendous hope and confidence about our future. But the Bible also says that we have eternal life now, in this age (John 6:47). We have it as a down payment of much more yet to come.

“This is a trustworthy saying,” Paul notes. We can be sure that God saves us by his mercy, not by our works. He then adds, “I want you to stress these things...” (verse 8). Titus should stress the Holy Spirit, grace and eternal life.

Why? “So that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.” When we realize that God has saved us by his mercy, we should respond with changes in our behavior. Sin caused the death of our Savior, and we do not want to participate in behavior that caused his death.

So we trust in God alone, but we also strive to do good works. We have been saved for that purpose (Ephesians 2:10). Good works cannot save us, but they are still good, and they are characteristic of people who trust God. God’s people are *devoted* to doing good; they are *eager* to do what is good (Titus 2:14). Grace leads us to a better life. “These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.”

### Something to avoid

As part of his closing comments for Titus, Paul warns, “But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless” (verse 9). Many of us have experienced “quarrels about the law”—debates about whether this or that is required or forbidden. If we try to base our salvation on keeping laws, we will inevitably end up arguing about which laws apply, about definitions of what is restricted, and whether there are any exceptions.



# Lectionary Readings for

October-November 2006

Many churches assign passages of Scripture to be read on each Sunday: passages from the Old Testament, the Gospels, and the epistles. This is called a lectionary—from the Latin word *lectio*, meaning “reading.” Below are readings based on the Revised Common Lectionary, which is used by many churches. (Catholic, Lutheran and Episcopal churches may use a slightly different lectionary; see [www.textweek.com](http://www.textweek.com) for more details.) Sermons are often based on one of the readings. We are now in year B of the three-year cycle, and in December we will start year C.

**Oct. 1**

Esther 7:1-10; 9:20-22  
 Psalm 124  
 Mark 9:38-50  
 James 5:13-20

**Oct. 8**

Genesis 2:18-24  
 Psalm 26  
 Mark 10:2-16  
 Hebrews 1:1-12

**Oct. 15**

Psalm 22:1-15  
 Amos 5:6-15  
 Mark 10:17-31  
 Hebrews 4:12-16

**Oct. 22**

Psalm 91:9-16  
 Isaiah 53:4-12  
 Mark 10:35-45  
 Hebrews 5:1-10

**Oct. 29**

Psalm 126  
 Jeremiah 31:7-9  
 Mark 10:46-52  
 Hebrews 7:23-28

**Nov. 5**

Ruth 1:1-18  
 Psalm 146  
 Mark 12:28-34  
 Hebrews 9:11-14

**Nov. 12**

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17  
 Psalm 127  
 Mark 12:38-44  
 Hebrews 9:24-28

**Nov. 19**

1 Samuel 1:4-20  
 Psalm 16  
 Mark 13:1-8  
 Hebrews 10:11-25

**Nov. 26**

2 Samuel 23:1-7  
 Psalm 93  
 John 18:33-37  
 Revelation 1:4-8

Debates like that miss the point. They are useless, because salvation is not based on the law. We should not waste our time with arguments about things that don't really matter.

However, if people are convinced that laws are important, they are rarely willing to drop the argument. So Paul gives Titus some pastoral advice: “Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him” (verse 10). If the person can't drop the subject, if he is stirring up trouble in the congregation by preaching salvation by works, then he should be avoided.

If someone says, You have to keep these laws in order to be saved, then that person is (no matter what he says) attempting to divide the congregation—he is saying that it's not enough to trust in Christ. If the person won't stop preaching this error, a division is unavoidable, and Titus can minimize the severity of that division by making it early. The person should not be allowed into the congregation to cause more trouble.

“You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned” (verse 11). He preaches that people will be saved or condemned by their works, and such a person will be judged by his works, and by his own standard, he will be condemned. Divisive behavior is the opposite of what God wants.

Paul closes, as ancient letters often did, with some notes about personal contacts and travel plans: “As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there” (verse 12). Titus's assignment as interim pastor would soon be up. Paul wanted to spend the winter with him in western Greece.

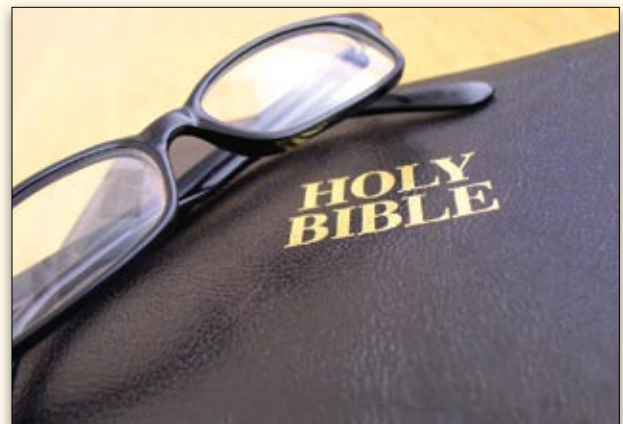
“Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need” (verse 13). They were probably the ones who carried the letter to Titus, on their way to somewhere else.

Paul then repeats an important theme: “Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives” (verse 14). If people work for their food and stay out of trouble, that is good (1 Thess. 4:11).

“Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all” (v. 15). ●

**Questions for discussion**

- 1. We should be law-abiding citizens who do good (v. 1). Is there ever a time when we should disobey the law?
- 2. People who are saved by grace should be eager to do good (v. 8). Why are some Christians not devoted to good works?
- 3. When can people have erroneous beliefs without being divisive? (v. 10)



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## Hmm...

When I was an atheist, I used the non-sectatorial argument that I didn't like God's alleged traits (i.e. he allows suffering on a grand scale), so he must not exist. But what he's like, and whether he exists or not, are two different issues. It's like saying, "God can only exist if he's the way I want him to be."

**Brian Knowles**

When we have completely renounced trying to make something of ourselves in the world...then we completely throw ourselves into God's arms, take God's own suffering in the world seriously rather than our own, and keep watch with Christ in Gethsemane. That, I think, is faith. That is conversion, and it is in this way that one becomes a human being, a Christian.

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer,**  
*Letters and Papers from Prison*

What is unique about the Christian gospel is that those who are called to be its witnesses are... forbidden to use coercion to enforce it. The toleration which a Christian is required to exercise is not something which he must exercise in spite of his or her belief that the gospel is true, but precisely because of this belief.

**Lesslie Newbigin**

Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or self-confidence.

**Robert Frost**

If we Christians would take all the energy we put into proving we're right and others are wrong and invested that energy in pursuing and doing good, somehow I think that more people would believe we are right.

**Brian McLaren,**  
*A New Kind of Christian*

Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief.

Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now.

You are not obligated to complete the work, But neither are you free to abandon it.

**Rabbi Tarfon,**  
*The Talmud*

It takes the whole Bible to read any part of the Bible. Every sentence is embedded in story and can no more be understood accurately or fully apart from the story than any one of our sentences spoken throughout the course of the day can be understood apart from our relationships and culture and the various ways in which we speak to our children and parents, our friends and enemies, our employers and employees—and our God.

**Eugene Petersen,**  
*Eat This Book*

All human beings remain aware of God, guiltily, with uncomfortable inklings of coming judgment that they wish they did not have. Only the gospel of Christ can speak peace to this distressful aspect of the human condition.

**J.I. Packer,**  
*Concise Theology*

What really counts in life is that at some time you have seen something, felt something, which is so great, so matchless, that everything else is nothing by comparison, that even if you forgot everything, you would never forget this.

**Søren Kierkegaard,**  
*Journals and Papers*

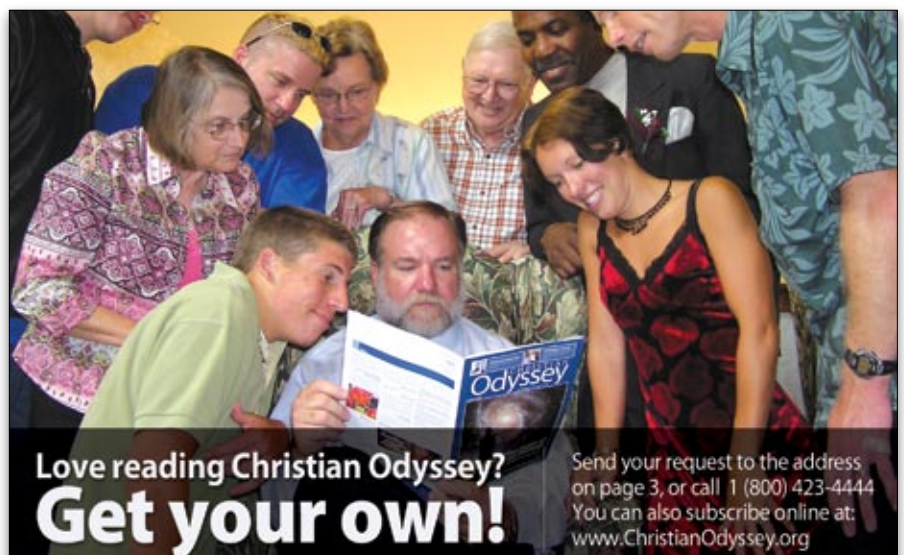
We shall have to repent, not so much for the deeds of the wicked people, as the appalling silence of the good people.

**Martin Luther King**

There are more than 10,000 tigers kept as pets in the USA. That is more than remain in the wild.

**British Broadcasting Corporation**

New research from American academics suggests that cohabitation is not proving to be the stepping stone to marriage that many hoped. Instead, the researchers say, cohabitation is now simply an "intense form of dating" because so many live-in couples then split up: half of all cohabiting unions ended within a year and 90 per cent within five years.



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