



Hope for the Left Behind Church

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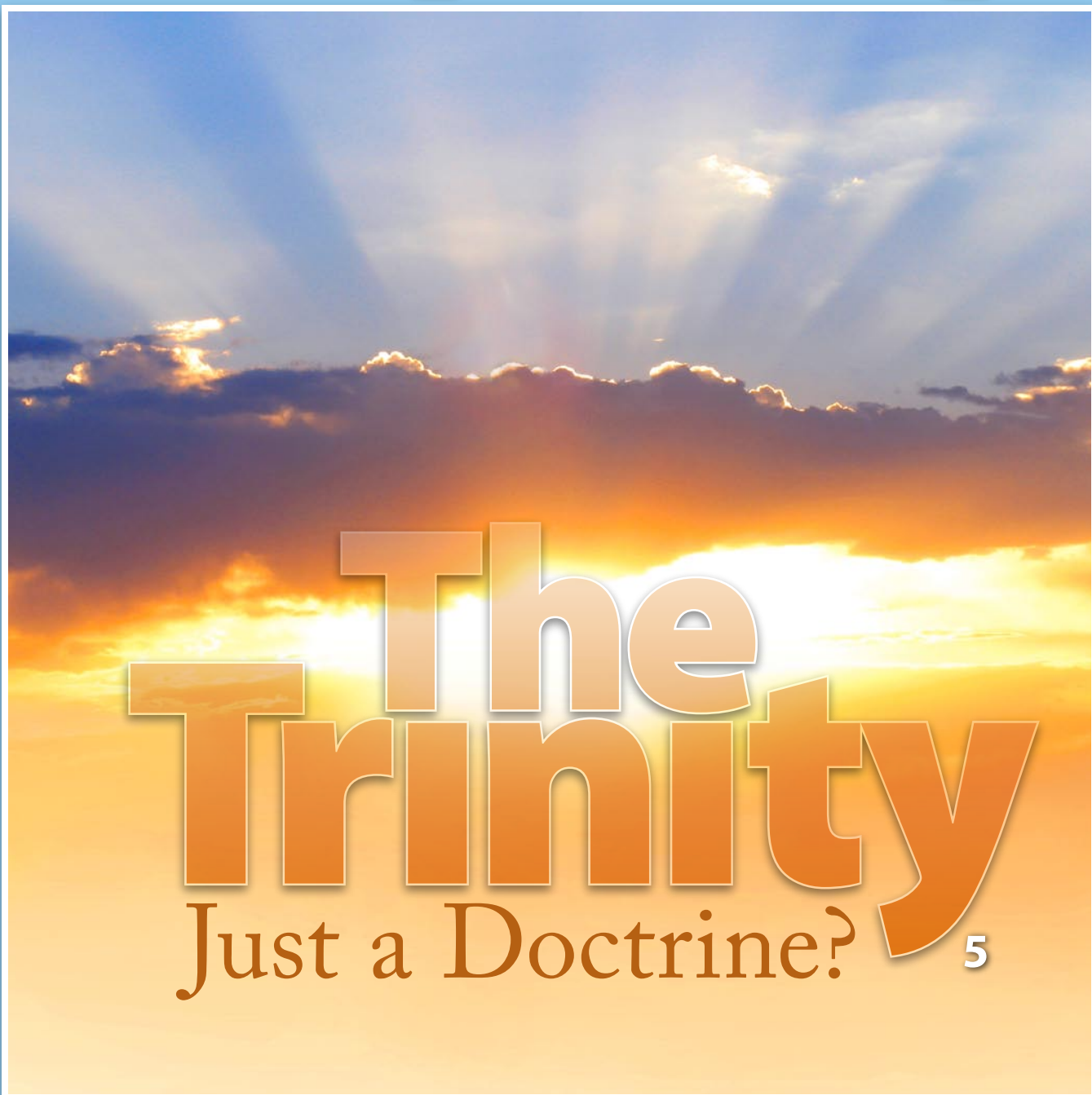
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Letters to the Editor

As usually happens when *Christian Odyssey* has such a beautiful cover, it disappears. Everybody wants the truth! Could you please replace the August/September issue? I only got as far as the metamorphosis article, and put it down, and when I came back—someone else was enjoying it.

HL, New York

I enjoy reading *Christian Odyssey*, because the articles are short and captivating, to the point and make sense. In the case of longer articles, a reader may stop reading at some point and never finish the article and miss the point. Thanks for doing a wonderful work with the magazine. God delights in those who have a zeal for doing good work.

LA, South Carolina

Thank you. We do try not to be "heard for our much speaking." But as Albert Einstein once said, "Make things as simple as possible, but not more simple than they are." Some topics do need a bit more space. To condense too far would be to shortchange both the subject and the reader. So if you do see a longer article, you can be confident that it is worth your time.

I really like the magazine *Christian Odyssey*.

I just have one problem with it. On some pages the print is so very light in color and hard to read. I am wearing bifocals and have old eyes. Some other articles are also very light, and on green or red background and are hard to read. Sure hope you can fix this problem.

DB, Maryland

Oops—thank you for reminding us. We do try to make our pages attractive, but readability must be the first priority.

I just read an article in the latest *Christian Odyssey* written by Dr. Lila Docken Bauman, entitled "The Problem of Forgiveness." I found it to be one of the most powerful and inspiring articles that I have ever read. I would like to thank her for allowing God to use her in such a powerful manner. If my thanks could be conveyed to her, I would appreciate it.

Cleo, email

We are happy to pass on your comment to Dr. Bauman.

When you mention that all are elect—does it mean that every human being will be given a new heart, or will be called and be given God's Spirit so everyone will believe?

EN, email

There is what appears to be biblical evidence for the future judgment and condemnation of at least some, so we cannot teach universal salvation, as wonderful a hope as that would be. Falling from grace is even given as a warning to Christians (1 Corinthians 3:12-15; 10:12). However, that some might fail to accept and receive salvation and be counted as lost is not to be confused with the question of whether all people are given the opportunity to hear the gospel message and to respond positively to the grace of Christ. While we do not believe in universal salvation, we do teach that in Christ, the Lord makes gracious and just provision for all human beings to hear the gospel and receive Christ, even for those who at death appear not to have believed the gospel.

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 91740-0730, or by e-mail to 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.

In Other Words

How selfish is your Christianity?

By James R. Henderson

The Akamba tribe in Kenya have a proverb, "Mbiti ye mwana ndiisua ikamina." It means, "Even the hyena with a cub does not eat all available food. Rather she goes hungry so that the cub can eat."

I've learned that this principle can apply not only to physical food, but to spiritual food as well. We can get so wrapped up in trying



what we perceive to be our own spiritual needs, that we forget that Christianity is about serving others, not just spiritually enriching ourselves.

If our main spiritual focus is ourselves, aren't we living a rather selfish form of the Christian life? But life is not all about us. It's about Jesus, and about loving others. There is a world out there that needs Jesus Christ, and our job is to share the good news he's given us. "Give a serving to seven and also to eight," says Solomon, "...do not withhold your hand" (Ecclesiastes 11: 2,

6, NKJ). When it comes to life in the Spirit, even the hyena has a lesson for us. The more we give, the more we have to keep giving.

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Too old to be useful?

By John Halford

When, 17 years ago, my eldest daughter announced that she was pregnant, everyone in the family was delighted. Except me. She was married, of ideal childbearing age, in good health and in every way ready to be a mother. I was just not ready to be a grandfather.

I associated being a grandfather as something that happened to old men. You are called “grandpa,” or “pappy,” and I wasn’t prepared for that. I was wrong, of course. I realize now that far from being a sign of premature aging, being a grandparent is a rejuvenating and intensely rewarding experience.



“There is no such thing as a useless or obsolete part of the body of Christ.”

My grandchildren—we now have six—have changed my life. In particular they have changed the way I look at the future. They remind me that long after I have gone on to whatever happens next, they will be here, living, loving and I hope, trying to make a positive difference in the world.

That gives me a stake in the future.

A selfish generation

As we get older, it is tempting to allow our horizons to shrink. Health concerns, fixed incomes and the other problems of later life replace the priorities of younger days. The Baby Boomers, the largest and arguably the most selfish generation ever, are beginning to retire now. They have always been a demanding lot, and at least in the developed world have built a society based around satisfying not only their needs, but also their whims.

They are living longer, too. Probably for the first time ever, we have four active, valid generations living at the same time. It is not at all unusual to be a great-grandfather, and even a great-great-grandfather now. When Social Security

programs were created in the mid-1930s, it was considered reasonable that after 50 or so years of working life, a man or woman was entitled to four or five years of relative ease. Then they would do the decent thing and depart the scene. The social welfare systems were not designed for us to go on living 15, 20 and more years after retirement. In their declining years, the Baby Boomers still have the ability to suck the potential out of the future.

However, the Bible perspective is that an older generation leaves something for the younger.

“Children should not have to save up for their parents, but parents for their children,” wrote Paul (2 Corinthians 12:14). This may seem more

idealistic than practical in a world of escalating health care, reverse mortgages and pension schemes facing bankruptcy. But there are other ways to “lay up”

for the future of your family.

It is with this in mind that the Worldwide Church of God, which sponsors this magazine, has launched a new initiative—*WCG Next*. Through various programs and activities we hope we can help develop the potential of *all* of our members—whoever they are and wherever they are—to work together to fulfill the church’s goal of living and sharing the good news that is the gospel. For a church to have four valid and active generations can be a liability. Or it can be a resource. We choose to see it as a resource.

Let those with age and experience encourage those who have youth, idealism and energy. Let those reaching the final chapters of their lives keep looking outward, and through mentoring and prayers help those coming behind build a foundation for their life of service. There is no such thing as a useless or obsolete part of the body of Christ. As Paul reminded the Christians at Ephesus nearly 2,000 years ago: “From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:16). ●

The Trinity

Just a Doctrine?

By Mike Feazell

Ask ten average Christians in ten average churches to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, and you'll probably get ten different explanations. Most Christians "accept" the Trinity as orthodox Christian doctrine. But they would be at a loss to explain why the doctrine matters, or how it affects their Christian lives.

As Catherine Mowry LaCugna explains in her introduction to *God For Us*, the Trinity is a doctrine that most people "consent to in theory but have little need for in the practice of Christian faith."¹

LaCugna continues, "On the one hand, the doctrine of the Trinity is supposed to be the center of faith. On the other hand, as Karl Rahner [one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century] once remarked, one could dispense with the doctrine of the Trinity as false and the major part of religious literature could well remain virtually unchanged."²

Does it make any difference?

And no wonder. The doctrine is hard to understand, and most discussions about it are...well... boring. For the average Christian, the kind of people who have families to feed, jobs to get to, and lives to live, what difference does an ancient doctrine make anyway? God is God, isn't he? Isn't that enough? If he happens to be Father, Son and Spirit instead of just Father, well, fine, but that doesn't really change anything from our end, does it?

Actually, it does matter. It matters a lot, in

fact—which is exactly what you'd expect us to say since, after all, why else would we be writing an article about an ancient, boring doctrine?

First, let's dispense with going through all the biblical proof that the doctrine is correct. You can find that elsewhere, including on the Worldwide Church of God website. [Just visit www.wcg.org, click on "Search our site," and type in "Trinity."] Instead, let's spend some time talking about why the doctrine of the Trinity matters, and especially, why it matters to you.

Let's start by taking a look at the common idea that God is a single, solitary being "out there" somewhere, looking down on Earth, watching us, judging

“What difference does an ancient doctrine make for the average Christian?”

us. Bette Midler put it to music in the chorus to her tune "From a Distance" with the lyrics, "And God is watching us, God is watching us, God is watching us from a distance."

This God comes in three main flavors: first, vanilla, the one who just kind of wound up the universe and then stretched out in the heavenly gazebo for a few-billion-year nap. (Who knows, maybe he wakes up once in a while and does something nice, kind of like the kind of God George Burns portrayed in the film *Oh God*.) Second, red hot cinnamon, the one who keeps careful tabs on everything everybody does, and since everybody blows it now and then, he gets madder and madder. His worshippers

say he takes joy in watching people who offend him slowly roast but never quite get done. Third is apricot, the one who might or might not like you, depending on many things, none of which are all that clear to anybody. He's the one that Oakland Raiders fans pray to for touchdowns.

Sometimes this God comes in an alternate flavor, water balloon. You might think water balloon isn't a flavor, but it is. It's chewy, and the variety of colors is endless, but it always tastes watery. This God is more of an abstract principle than a supreme being, kind of a "spirit of everything" that you can try to get in touch with if you empty your head of all thoughts and sit still long enough without going to sleep. (I think that's where Burger King commercials come from.)

A God who wants to share

The God of the Bible is not like that. The God of the Bible is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These three divine Persons³ share perfect love, joy, unity, peace, and fellowship. And the reason that's important to know is that when the Bible talks about us being "in Christ" it means that we get to take part in that divine kind of life. Just like Christ is the beloved of the Father, so we too, because we are "in him," are also the beloved of the Father.

That means that you are included in the household of God. It means you're not an outsider or a stranger. You're

does love us and we really are on the ins with him. And again, how do we know? Because Jesus, you know, "God with us," "God in the flesh," the one the Father sent not to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17), is the Father's Son, and that means that the Son of God is now one of us. And as one of us, but still God, only God in the flesh now, he dragged the whole ragged Coxeys Army (look it up on Wikipedia if you don't have a Funk and Wagnall's) of us home to the Father right through the front door.

No, we didn't deserve it and no, we didn't earn it. We didn't even ask for it. But he did it anyway, because that's the exact reason he made us in the first place—so he could share with us the life he has shared eternally with the Father and the Spirit. That's why he tells us he made us in his image (Genesis 1:26).

Showing us the Father

Salvation isn't about a change of location, floating off to some secret set of coordinates in the Delta Quadrant called heaven, as if that would solve all our problems. And it's not about a new super government patrolled by angelic cops who never miss an infraction of the divinely decimal penal code.

Salvation is about getting adopted into God's family and learning how to live in it. And the Trinity is at the heart of it: The Father (Let's get technical—the First

“These three divine Persons share perfect love, joy, unity, peace, and fellowship. That's important because when the Bible talks about us being 'in Christ' it means that we are to share in that divine kind of life.”

not even a respected guest. You're one of the kids, beloved of the Father, with free run of the house, the grounds, and the fridge.

The trouble is, you probably have a hard time believing that. You know you're an @#%&*, you know what you're really like deep down inside, so you think God doesn't like you. How could he, you figure. You don't even like yourself. So based on your assessment of your "goodness/badness" ratio, you determine that God is more than likely mad at you, and *far* more than likely mad at all those other @#%&* types you meet in traffic every day.

But the whole point of God letting us know through the Scriptures that he is Father, Son and Spirit, and not just "God out there somewhere," is so that we'd know he really

Person of the Godhead) loves us so much, in spite of our screw-ups, that he sent the Son (the Second Person of the Godhead) to do everything it took to bring us home (John 1:1, 14), and the Father and the Son sent the Spirit (the Third Person of the Godhead) to live in us and teach us how to live in God's family so we can enjoy it like we were created to do instead of being screw-ups forever.

In other words, the God of the Bible is not three separate Gods, where one, the temper challenged, unpredictable Father, is so furious at humans that he just has to kill somebody in order to calm down, so the sweet, loving Son, seeing Dad about to lose it, steps up and says, "Okay, if you've got to kill someone, then kill me, but spare these people." The doctrine of the Trinity is important precisely

¹ *God For Us*, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Foreword, p. ix.

² *Ibid*, p. 6.

³ Keep in mind that the Father, Son, and Spirit are not "persons" in the same way we humans are. They are not three Gods, but one, and each "Person" of the Godhead is distinct, but not

separate from the others. For more background, see "Church History Corner" in our May 2005 issue.

⁴ You might enjoy "Was Jesus Plan B?," in our August/September issue, p. 20.

key points

1 God created all humans in his image, and he wants all people to share in the love shared by the Father, the Son and the Spirit.

2 The Son became a human to redeem all humanity through his birth, life, death and resurrection and ascension.

3 Christ has already paid for our sins, and there is no longer any debt to pay. God has already forgiven us, and eagerly desires that we turn to him.

4 We cannot enjoy the blessing of his love if we don't believe he loves us. We cannot enjoy his forgiveness unless we believe he has forgiven us.

5 When we turn to God, believe the good news, and pick up our cross and follow Jesus, the Spirit will lead us into the transformed life of the kingdom of God.

because it keeps us from seeing God in such a ridiculous way, and yet, that is how a whole lot of people *do* see God.

If you want to know what the Father is like, just look at Jesus, because Jesus is the perfect revelation of the Father. Jesus told Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). He told the crowd, "I and the Father are one." We know how the Father feels about us because we know how Jesus feels about us.

To summarize, God is not some isolated cosmic bean counter "out there" keeping tabs on us in preparation for Judgment Day, nor is he three Gods with very different ideas about how to deal with humanity. The God of the Bible is one God who is three divine Persons, in perfect unity and accord, who love each other in perfect love and dwell in indescribable joy, and who created us for the express purpose of sharing that life with them through our adoption into Christ, who is eternally the beloved of his Father.

That's why the doctrine of the Trinity matters. If we don't understand God the way he reveals himself in the Bible, then we wind up with all kinds of messed up, funky and scary ideas about who God is and what he might be cooking up to do to us some day.

Reconciliation for everyone

You're still not convinced, are you? Well, try reading this one again: "...while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). God did not wait for you to get good enough to bring you into his household. You can't get good enough, which is the reason he went after you to bring you home in the first place. When Paul says God saves sinners, he's talking about everybody, since that's what everybody is—a sinner. (By the way, if you're worried God might find out how rotten you really are and send a lightning bolt your way, take heart, he's known all along and loves you anyway.)⁴

Paul makes the point even stronger in verse 10: "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!"

Did you notice how Paul puts that reconciliation with God in the past tense? Jesus died for our sins—*past tense*. God does not count our sins against us—*period*. They've

already been paid for. Jesus has already put us in good standing with God. All that remains for us now is to turn to God (repent), believe the good news (have faith), and follow Jesus (let the Holy Spirit teach us how to enjoy life in the new creation).

Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." When we think of God in any other way than the way he revealed himself in the Bible—as the Father, Son, and Spirit who created us and redeemed us and have made us to share their joy though union with Jesus Christ—we're going to find these words of Jesus daunting and discouraging.

But when we know God the way he reveals himself, we can say with all assurance of joy, "Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 8:1). "For God," Paul wrote to the Colossian church, "was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:19-20).

All humanity is included in that reconciliation, according to Paul. In the doctrine of the Trinity, God has shown himself to be the God who loves the world and who beckons every person to come to Christ and take part in the joy of life in the household of God. There is no person whom God does not want, whom God does not include, whom God does not love. And in Christ, following the Spirit's lead, we are all freed from the chains of sin to come to the Father whose arms are open wide to receive us, if only we will.

That's why the doctrine of the Trinity matters. Without it, we might as well join the Hittites wondering whether Baal will flood out the crops with storms this year or burn them out with lightning. In Jesus Christ, God has taken up our cause as his own. God has, through the atoning work of Jesus, healed us from head to toe, mind and heart, and made us the Father's Son's best friends, no, much more than that; made us adopted children of the Father, brothers and sisters of our older Brother and full members of the household of God.

With Paul, we can only say, "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" ●

Hope for the *Left Behind Church*

Is bigger always better? Are numbers the only way to measure success? Not according to Ruth Tucker, author of *Left Behind in a Megachurch World*.

By Sheila Graham

Ruth Tucker grew up in what she refers to as a left-behind church—a little rural church that was the center of activity for her and her friends. “I will carry memories of those spirited times to the grave, whether the free-for-all softball games with the pastor as pitcher or the sultry days of summer Bible camp or the rollicking harvest hayrides or the frigid sledding parties with a bonfire at the top of the hill,” she remembers.

Her little church was established by two missionary ladies back in the 1930s. Tucker wondered if they could have imagined the outcome of their work. “Did they imagine that their little ripple effect—their humble

shouldn’t want to grow, but again the growth should be the right kind of growth. So much of the growth in the megachurches, or the mega-wannabes, comes at the expense of another church.”

Dr. Tucker says that in the arena dominated by megachurches, the most authentic Christian voices may be heard in small congregations. “When I think of authentic Christian voice I’m often thinking of Paul’s reference to ‘When I am weak then I am strong,’ or Jesus’ ‘the first shall be last’ and ‘take up your cross and follow me.’ Yes, we do see in Acts numbers of people who came to the Lord, but when it was the church itself, in the first century especially, we’re looking at small numbers. We’re looking at a rag-tag bunch of disciples living and working in very tenuous times.

“There’s real danger when the church of Christ sees great success. Jesus and Paul warned about that, and we ought to see dangers. That’s not what Jesus was talking about when he spoke the words, ‘follow

thou me’ and ‘come and take up thy cross.’”

But can a church become too small to be

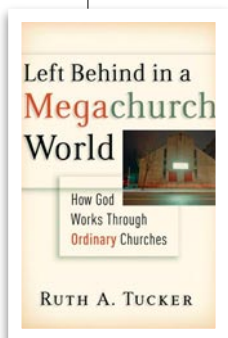
“In the arena dominated by megachurches, the most authentic Christian voices may be heard in small congregations.”

and often awkward efforts—would nurture sons and daughters whose ministries, vocations and influence have spanned the globe?”

I asked her what she meant by left-behind churches. “The title of the book came out of a class. I realized most of my students would be going out into smaller churches. We hear of wonderful stories of this church and that church doubling in size every four years, but that’s not the rule. I felt it’s important for these young ministers to see that God works in little churches, even churches losing membership, not just the ones holding their own. It doesn’t mean God is not working if the church is not growing or if the church is getting smaller. It also doesn’t mean we

effective? “There are churches of thousands that are too small, too big, too something, to be effective. But small churches have peculiar problems that other churches do not have. Being able to provide for a minister is always an issue, and so is having a facility or location. But you can have a wonderful group of a dozen or two dozen, three dozen people who are vibrant Christians reaching out to the neighborhood.”

Yes, but what about those churches where many of their members don’t live in the neighborhood where the church is located? “That’s unfortunate,” Tucker said, “If you are a little neighborhood church and you have 36 people, you’re a lot bigger than the church of 36 spread all over three counties. A church so spread



The Woman Accused of Adultery

By Joyce Catherwood

John 8:1-11

Just before dawn, the door to our hiding place burst open and slammed against the wall. Scribes and Pharisees stormed in, screaming, “Adulteress!”

They grabbed me and shoved me toward the door. I glanced back at the man I had trusted with my heart and deepest needs. He just stared at the floor. Why did they leave him behind? I later learned that my foolish indiscretion had thrust me into the middle of a malicious plot to entrap and accuse the popular rabbi, Jesus.

I was immediately sandwiched between two fast-walking Pharisees, who gripped my arms so tightly they left bruises. I had no time to cover myself appropriately. Fighting back tears and ashamed, I looked down as they rushed me through the streets, passing shopkeepers and vendors setting up for the day. I felt sickened and humiliated beyond words.

When we arrived at the temple courts, my band of captors plowed through a large gathering until we reached Jesus. He was seated, teaching. The two Pharisees pushed me in front of Jesus loudly proclaiming they had caught me in the act of adultery. As I stood there disheveled and openly exposed, I could only imagine the looks of sheer disgust and the salacious whispering going on behind me. I knew what I had done was so wrong, one of the gravest sins according to our law. But in our culture, marriages are arranged at childhood and are sometimes loveless. We become the property of husbands who can be arrogant and overbearing. Vulnerable and starved for affection, some risk seeking love elsewhere.

Then the Pharisees said: “The law of Moses says we should stone her. What do you say?”

I gasped as I heard those words. Roman law forbade capital punishment. Would they really stone me? Horrified, I looked at Jesus. He seemed to ignore their challenge, and instead, bent down and wrote in the dust with his finger. Frustrated, they continued to shout questions at him. Jesus finally straightened up and said, “If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone.” Then he bent down again, writing more.

Trembling, I waited for that first stone. Instead, to my surprise, my accusers began to slip away one by one, beginning with the most prominent. Jesus stood up and asked me, “Where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

Shaken, I responded, “No one, sir.” Jesus then said, “Neither do I condemn you.” He told me I was free to go and should leave my life of sin.

I was astounded by Jesus’ tenderness and forgiveness. It was such a stark contrast to the contempt of the scribes and Pharisees. As I turned and made my way through the crowd, a woman handed me her shawl so I could cover myself. Once on the street, I walked away quickly. I felt the wind against my face and breathed deep, cleansing breaths of freedom. Jesus had pardoned me. So great was God’s mercy, it filled my empty heart and gave me new hope. ●



out has to transition into becoming a neighborhood church. Whether it’s a rental property or whatever it is, get your base in that community. How good it would be if this church of 36 expanded so some of its members could start a group of eight or so in their towns, with the church still maintaining the 36 people and pulling in people from the neighborhood.

“A wonderful student of mine was involved in a little left-behind church where nothing was happening. Then a woman in their church was called by a neighbor to help out some relatives who lived in a mobile home park. One after another this family and their friends got connected to the church. Within a month or two the church had doubled in size with people with tattoos and bandanas coming on motorcycles and in beat-up trucks. That church was revitalized with everyone so excited because they’ve got more people coming.

“We’ve got to put roots down in a neighborhood and do it the way Jesus did. That is ‘come follow me.’ When we are way too small to get involved in large projects by ourselves, we’ve got to get people in the neighborhood involved in humanitarian outreach programs. There are people out there who really would like to have opportunities to help and work.”

If you’re part of a small congregation, or large, whether pastor or member, you’ll find *Left Behind in a Megachurch World* well-researched and full of encouraging and inspiring examples of how God works through ordinary churches to accomplish the extraordinary. ●



Dr. Tucker is an author, lecturer, and former associate professor of missiology at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. *Left Behind in a Megachurch World*, Baker Publishing Group, 2006.

Meeting a Living Legend

By Curtis May

It isn't often that a man gets to meet one of his boyhood heroes. I grew up in the racially segregated South of the mid 20th century. For me, an African American, segregation was a fact of life. We went to different schools from whites, drank from different water fountains and sat in the back of the bus. I suppose I accepted it—that was the way it always had been; the way it always would be.

But in a tense summer, nearly 50 years ago, we sensed that a change was in the air. A nonviolent campaign against segregation had begun to gather momentum. Three names dominated the news. They were Martin Luther King, Ralph Abernathy and Fred Shuttlesworth. King and Abernathy are both dead now. But Fred Shuttlesworth is alive and well in semi-retirement in Cincinnati. So when my friend, Pastor George Hart, asked me if I would like to meet him, I jumped at the chance.

Fred Shuttlesworth, age 85, is not as well-known as some of the other leaders of the civil rights movement. As a young man he was aggressive and passionate, and he espoused the nonviolent agenda of his compatriots—he was proactively nonviolent in advancing the cause at every opportunity.

As I sat and talked with this elderly gentleman in the sanctuary of the Greater New Light Baptist Church, which he founded in Cincinnati, I could still feel the passion and energy that drove him to face police batons, savage dogs and angry mobs in those desperate times.

Fred Shuttlesworth was born in Alabama on March 18, 1922. After graduating from Selma University in 1951 and Alabama State College in 1952, he became pastor of the Bethel Baptist Church in 1953. In May 1956, Shuttlesworth established the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR). In December 1956, the Supreme Court ruled that bus segregation in Montgomery was illegal. Immediately, Shuttlesworth announced that the ACMHR would test segregation laws in Birmingham.

In 1957 Shuttlesworth joined Martin Luther King, Ralph David Abernathy and Bayard Rustin to form the Southern Christian Leadership Conference



(Left to right) Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth, Rev. Ralph Abernathy, and Dr. Martin Luther King, are shown as they walked to their press conference in Birmingham, Alabama, May 1963.

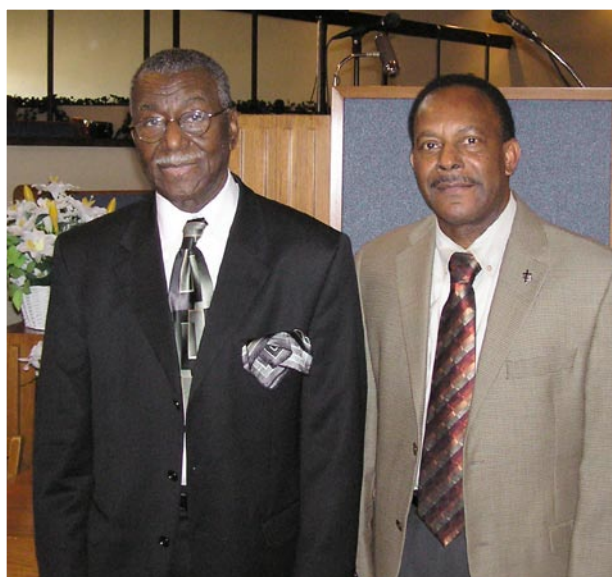
(SCLC). Based in Atlanta, Georgia, the main objective of the SCLC was to coordinate and assist local organizations working for the full equality of African-Americans. The new organization was committed to using nonviolence in the struggle for civil rights, and adopted the motto: "Not one hair of one head of one person should be harmed."

Fred Shuttlesworth's enemies did not share the nonviolent agenda. On the evening of December 25, 1956, 16 sticks of dynamite destroyed his house, even shredding the mattress of the bed he was lying on. Miraculously, he survived. The following year a white

mob beat him with whips and chains during an attempt to integrate an all-white public school. During this period Martin Luther King described Shuttlesworth as “the most courageous civil rights fighter in the South.”

I asked him if, looking back, he would do anything differently. “I would not leave anything out,” he said without hesitation. “Including the beatings and the bombing. I never felt more safe and secure. I could hear God saying, ‘I’m here; be still and know that I am God.’”

It was obvious talking to this dignified man that he is still an uncompromising, Christ-centered and Scripture-focused leader. He is still concerned and involved with civil rights. He told me that the movement needed to find its way again. “There is too much money involved,” he said. “We need to find humble, Christ-centered leadership that characterized the movement in the past.”



Rev. Fred L. Shuttlesworth (left) and Curtis May. May, 2007

As we talked, I reflected on how much people like me owe to the courage and faith of people like Fred Shuttlesworth. As he was getting his head beaten in, blown out of his bed and arrested 38 times, I was in the “safe haven” of grade school. Even then I admired his raw courage and dogged tenacity as he taught us not to hate anybody, although my friends and I did not always succeed in living up to this ideal. Given half a chance, though, I would have been out there working alongside him.

Thousands of grade school and college students did march, even elementary students, especially those who

lived in and around Birmingham. They were arrested, beaten, attacked by police dogs and knocked down by water hoses. They were fighting, even sacrificing their lives for racial equality and human dignity, to not be called the “N” word by state officials, for the right to a good education, access to job opportunities, for enfranchisement and basic civil rights, such as defending our families, eating in a restaurant, using a public restroom or riding on a bus.

Our educational resources were severely limited. Most black schools were supplied with the used books that white schools were finished with. But armed with courage inspired in large part from heroes like Fred Shuttlesworth, I graduated in 1963 from Sunshine High School in Newbern, Alabama, as valedictorian. Even so, no scholarships were available. They were for the white schools down the road. Later I moved to New York, where I had relatives. I worked and attended night school. Then I got married and moved with my wife, Jannice, to California and attended college.

We have been tremendously blessed over the years, pastoring churches and traveling internationally.

Our children both graduated from college and are married. Our daughter Angela is a CPA and real estate agent. Our son Bradley is a police officer in flight operations. They both have healthy relationships across racial and ethnic lines.

Fred Shuttlesworth’s life shows that we can change things. Sometimes the task may seem impossible. There are days when we might even seem to be losing ground. But I believe to work for justice and understanding is part of every Christian’s responsibility, and Fred Shuttlesworth showed how faith, hope and clarity of vision will eventually win the day.

He reminded me that the struggle is not over. America may be a freer, less racist place than it was 50 years ago, although there are still pockets of ignorance and prejudice on all sides. But there are still too many places in our world where the struggle against prejudice is still in its early stages. In some, it has not even begun.

I thought about this as I talked with the brave, dignified old man in Cincinnati. How different my life might have been if he and people like him had not had the courage to say, “Enough is enough.” ●



Curtis May is an ordained minister and the Director of the Office of Reconciliation Ministries of the Worldwide Church of God. He lives with his wife Jannice in Beaumont, California.

The Dead Sea Scrolls 60 years later

By Tim Finlay

About 1900 years ago, religious zealots living in an isolated desert community near the Dead Sea sealed some of their sacred writings in clay jars and hid them in isolated caves in the cliffs. These writings remained undisturbed until 1947, when a Bedouin shepherd boy rediscovered them. It was the most exciting archeological find of the 20th century.

The Dead Sea Scrolls is the name conventionally given to a group of scrolls mainly found in 11 caves near the site of Qumran, but with a few also found at other sites near the Dead Sea, such as Masada, Nachal Hever, and Murabba'at. These scrolls were written on animal hide or papyrus and contained three types of material: copies of the Hebrew Scriptures, works from what scholars call "apocrypha" or "pseudepigrapha," and documents pertaining to the Qumran community itself.

“The scrolls provide evidence that information handed down in the books of the Bible is accurate.”

Contrary to the cries of a few sensationalists, the Dead Sea Scrolls are not revolutionary or damaging to the claims of traditional Christianity or Judaism. Rather, they strengthen our trust in the validity of the Hebrew Scriptures common to Jews and Christians, further our understanding of early Judaism, and deepen our background knowledge of the New Testament. In this article, we examine five ways the scrolls have contributed to our understanding.

1 Established the accuracy of the Old Testament text

One paper I worked on as a doctoral student compared the numerous scrolls in cave 4 of Qumran containing parts of Deuteronomy to the text of Deuteronomy found in Codex Leningradensis. This codex, dated A.D. 1009, is the oldest surviving complete Hebrew Bible. I found that several scrolls from Qumran dating between 125 and 25 B.C. differed at the letter level from Codex Leningradensis by 1 to 4 percent, and most of these changes were only spelling differences. Moreover, one manuscript, 4QDeut^g, the seventh Deuteronomy manuscript found at Qumran, was letter for letter identical with Codex Leningradensis.

My findings only confirmed what other scholars had shown. The Dead Sea Scrolls had established the antiquity of the Masoretic Text, the tradition of the Hebrew manuscripts painstakingly copied by the Masoretes for centuries. This text underlies the printed Hebrew Bibles used by Jews today and most modern translations used by Catholics and Protestants. In addition to several Deuteronomy scrolls, other Dead Sea Scrolls of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Minor Prophets

attest to the antiquity of the Masoretic Text. We now have documents with the same basic text as used in our Bibles that are over 1,000 years earlier than any previously known.

Almost everything we find in the hundreds of biblical Dead

Sea Scrolls is contained in the Masoretic Text, or the somewhat different Septuagint Greek text, or the Samaritan Pentateuch. The biggest exceptions are a mere two verses worth of material in 1 Samuel previously known only in Josephus, and a verse in Psalm 145 that also occurred in a couple of medieval manuscripts. We can have confidence, then, that very little has been lost or altered in the last 2,000 years of transmission of the biblical manuscripts.

2 Enhanced our knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic

Like the Old Testament, most of the Dead Sea Scrolls are written in Hebrew, but some are written in Aramaic. The scrolls give us a better understanding of Middle Aramaic, the period between the Aramaic found in Ezra and Daniel, and that of the classical Targums—the Aramaic translations of Scripture dating to A.D. 400 or later. The scrolls are an even more important source in understanding the Hebrew language from the

3 Helped our understanding of the background to the New Testament

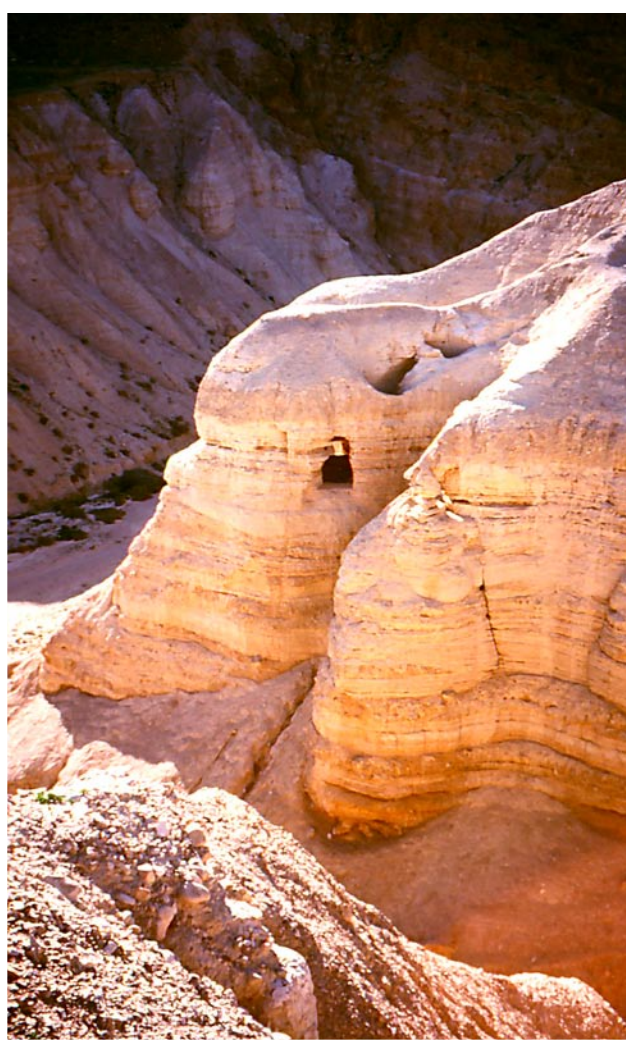
The Dead Sea Scrolls were written before the New Testament existed and do not mention Jesus or the apostles. However, they frequently provide background information that illuminates our understanding of the New Testament.

For example, in Luke 7, John the Baptist asks Jesus if he really is the Messiah. Jesus replied: “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor” (Luke 7:22). Until the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the connection between this list Jesus mentioned and what was expected of the Messiah was unclear. However, 4Q^{Messianic}Apocalypse specifically lists healing the wounded, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead and preaching good news to the poor as the things that the Messiah would accomplish. This, then, is proof that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah—contrary to the opinion of many New Testament scholars before the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.

The scrolls also provide background to the book of Revelation. Like the early church, the Qumran community was a marginalized Jewish group who looked forward with hope to God’s end-time judgment upon the world. In the New Testament, this is particularly expressed in the book of Revelation, an apocalyptic work. The Dead Sea Scrolls also contain apocalyptic works such as Aramaic Levi, five Enochic apocalypses, The Vision of Amram, Jubilees, Apocryphon of Daniel, and The Four Kingdoms. These apocalyptic works, in addition to other scrolls with thematic connections to Revelation, such as the War Scroll and the New Jerusalem Texts, vastly increase our background knowledge to the last book of the Bible.

4 Increased our knowledge of early Judaism

Until 60 years ago, our main sources for first-century Judaism were the New Testament and Josephus. But the Dead Sea Scrolls provide scores of documents describing the practices and theology of the Qumran community, a group that existed between approximately 100 B.C. and A.D. 70. According to almost all scholars, this community belonged to the Essenes, a Jewish sect briefly mentioned by the historians Josephus and Pliny the Elder. The scrolls, therefore, give us much information about the Essenes but also additional knowledge about



Some of the caves in the sandstone cliffs at Qumran near the Dead Sea, where the first scrolls were found hidden.

fourth century B.C. to the second century A.D. The Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered about the same time as the founding of the modern state of Israel, the only state that has Hebrew as its official language, and the discovery was one factor in helping the fledgling state form a Hebrew identity in continuity with its past traditions.

other groups that the Essenes reacted to or interacted with, such as the Pharisees and Sadducees mentioned in the New Testament. For example, five documents among the scrolls label the Pharisees as “those who look for smooth things” (they were less strict in certain ways than the Essenes) and accuse them of misinterpreting the law.

5 Established the antiquity of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

The Old Testament typically found in Protestant Bibles contains the same books, although in a different order, as the books of the Hebrew Bible used by the Jews. Catholics, Eastern Orthodox churches and Oriental Orthodox churches have additional books in their Old Testaments, and scholars call these additional books deuterocanonical, apocrypha or pseudepigrapha. Prior to the discovery of the Dead

Sea Scrolls, these works were almost entirely known only in Greek, Latin or other translations.

Sea Scrolls, these works were almost entirely known only in Greek, Latin or other translations. As a Protestant, I normally use the Protestant Old Testament, those Hebrew writings that the Jews decided were Scripture. I recognize, however, that the additional Old Testament material preserved by the Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox and Ethiopic Orthodox churches, etc. is of great antiquity, and that much of it was originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic. Whether one calls these works deuterocanonical, apocryphal or pseudepigraphal, the Dead Sea Scrolls have shown that there is much to value here.

We live in a time when there is much speculation about the origins of Christianity. Much of it is fanciful, useful only to provide grist for the fiction writer’s mill. But some people find it disturbing, and wonder if we have been told the whole story. Because it took several decades before all the scrolls were published, some people speculated that truth damaging to the

claims of traditional Christianity was being suppressed. Now that all the scrolls are published, we can see that the opposite is the case. They provide evidence that the information contained in the

books of the Bible has been handed down accurately, and can be trusted. ●

“Today there is much fanciful speculation about the origins of Christianity. The scrolls show the information we have can be trusted.”

books of the Bible has been handed down accurately, and can be trusted.

The Dead Sea Scrolls contained Hebrew or Aramaic copies of the following apocryphal books: Tobit, Ben Sira (or Ecclesiasticus), the letter of Jeremiah, Jubilees and 1 Enoch. The first three of these are in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles; the last two are in the Ethiopic Orthodox Bible.

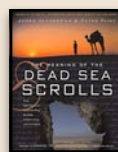
In most of our Bibles, there are 150 psalms, but in the Septuagint (the ancient Greek version of the Jewish Scriptures), there is a psalm 151, which has the following superscription: “This psalm is ascribed to David as his own composition (though it is outside the number), after he had fought with Goliath.” The psalm speaks about David being small amongst his older brothers, about him tending sheep, being anointed by God and defeating Goliath. In Qumran, the same psalm was found in Hebrew but with a simpler superscription: “A Hallelujah of David the Son of Jesse.”

The same scroll that contained this psalm, 11QPs^a, contained two other Hebrew psalms previously preserved only in Syriac by the Syriac Orthodox Church, and three completely unknown psalms. As a side note, I had the privilege to study the Dead Sea Scrolls under James Sanders, the scholar who un-

Timothy D. Finlay earned his Ph.D. at Claremont, where the Ancient Biblical Manuscript Center housed, with the agreement of Israel, a complete set of photographs of the Dead Sea Scrolls before they entered the public domain. He first saw the scrolls themselves in Israel in 1997, and throughout this autumn is leading groups of students to see the several important scrolls, including 11QPs^a and 4QMessianicApocalypse, on exhibition in San Diego. He is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Azusa Pacific University and is working on a book on the literary genres of the Old Testament.



For Further Reading:



The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Their Significance For Understanding the Bible, Judaism, Jesus, and Christianity, James VanderKam and Peter Flint (Harper-Collins, 2002)



The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English, Geza Vermes (Penguin Classics, 2004)

The Prayer God **Always** Answers

By Bernie Schnippert

How can you be confident God will listen and reply to your prayer? The answer is simply to pray a certain prayer that God ALWAYS answers. Here it is. Simply pray, “Dear God, please show me my sins. Show me that I am a sinner!”

Even if you have doubts about God’s existence, if you pray this prayer sincerely wanting an answer, I believe God *will* answer you, and *you will know* it is an answer from God.

But be careful, because the answer will shake you to your core.

Whereas even if you have not had up until now a personal relationship with God, you have probably been told you have faults, but basically you have ignored them or rationalized them away as “errors in judgment,” or “traits of human nature,” or “innocent lack of knowledge” and the like.

This time will be different

Although I cannot predict how God will enlighten you to the fact that you are a sinner, when the answer comes, and come it will if you pray the prayer sincerely, the realization you sin will be like a stab of searing pain into your heart.

To pick an example: Even if you fake a halfhearted dismissal to your spouse when she says you are “too materialistic” as you pine for a new car you cannot afford, when God shows you that you are in fact not just “materialistic,” but “covetous” and covetousness is a sin and you are a sinner, you will come face to face with something you have never understood about yourself before.

When this happens, you will realize, deep inside, that a supreme being exists who heard your prayer and for an instant involved himself personally, in your own life, to answer your prayer and show you something you could not otherwise see.

You will believe that you prayed to God, and that he exists, and that he expressed himself personally to you in answer to your prayer. And you will be right.

What happens next?

But, if you are to get more answers to more prayers, there is another step. The first step is to pray the prayer and get the answer. The second step is to act on the answer. For, unless you act on the answer, you were not really sincere, were you?

You see, God is not to be toyed with. He does not answer prayer just to take a dare that he is there or not. He answers the sinner’s prayer because (amazingly) he wants a relationship with the sinner—you—but your sins and spiritual blindness are preventing it.

He understands that humans are sinners and that sin cuts us off from him and that all of this is a vicious circle of sorts. He wants to break through the circle of sin and unanswered prayer. To do this, though, you must cooperate. He will pass the “test prayer.” But now you must pass the test of what to do with your newfound knowledge by taking the second step.

“God answers the sinner’s prayer because he wants a relationship with the sinner—you.”

What is this second step? The second step was explained by Peter on the day of Pentecost to a whole group of people who learned they were sinners and asked, in effect, “What are we to do?” Peter said, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

This second step is really a process, and is what the whole Christian life is about—coming to see you need the Savior. It takes one’s entire life to fully work out what this all means. And, it ultimately means a lot more prayers, more “second steps,” and more articles and a lot more explanations that cannot be made here.

But all this starts with a simple prayer that God *always* hears and answers. Indeed, he wants to hear it, and answer it. It is this: “God, show me my sins.”

And this, dear fellow humans, is what we poor sinners “are to do.” ●



Bernie Schnippert is an ordained minister, attorney and General Counsel for the Worldwide Church of God. He lives with his wife, Arlene, in Bend, Oregon.



Encounter 2008:

WCG Next is a vision for Worldwide Church of God members, congregations, pastoral networks and denominational ministries to embrace new people in new places, new cultures, and within new (emerging) generations. As a part of *WCG Next*, Generations Ministries (GenMin) promotes and resources intergenerational ministry within congregations and families through camps, mission trips, training seminars and retreats.

GenMin recently announced a new *WCG Next* event for people of all ages—an intergenerational retreat named *Encounter*. We asked Ted Johnston, GenMin national director, to tell us more.

GenMin is known for its camps. Where does *Encounter* fit in?

Encounter is a retreat experience that church members of all ages can share together. It's an opportunity to leave behind our day-to-day frenetic activities to gather as a family and enjoy activities of all kinds *together*.

Encounter is not a camp, we hasten to say, because not all people, especially seniors, would consider a camp experience to be their choice for a retreat. But imagine the best experiences we've enjoyed in the past through our camps, conventions and district weekends; mix all these together with our *WCG Next* vision and our Christ-centered theology, and you have *Encounter*.

Our camp ministry experience and successes have taught us much about fostering intergenerational relationships within local congregations. As Dan Rogers (director of WCG Church Administration & Development) likes to joke, WCG not only stands for Worldwide Church of God; it also stands for We (do) Camp Good! God has blessed our camps, and we've learned

a great deal as we've grown over the last six years from one national camp (in Orr, Minnesota) to 16 regional camps. And now our vision is for at least 24. We desire that all WCG-USA congregations will be able to use our camps as the starting place for deepening relationships in our families—relationships that will continue back home and that will help develop new generations of leaders for our congregations and families.

Camps have taught us how to bridge generations through the worship, discussions, learning, games and fun that campers and adult staff share together. Now, we're going to take what we've learned at camp and transfer it to a retreat setting that is attractive to all ages.

You use the word *intergenerational* a lot. Tell us more.

The love and life of Jesus transcends all boundaries. All genders, cultures, races and generations are brought together and "made one" in him. We want to express that beautiful relational oneness that comes through Christ to us by being a church family that is truly one in heart and mind. So what I mean by intergenerational is *all generations—children, teens, young adults and older adults—gathered as one family—working, playing, talking, learning as one*. This intergenerational emphasis is increasingly important as our Western society continues to fragment and segregate the generations. So we're finding ways to make our camps, seminars and retreats more intergenerational. For example, at some of our camps this year we offered a one day *Grace-Based Parenting* seminar to visiting adults. And we plan on doing more to embrace all age-groups within our camps. But because camps tend to be fairly rustic, we also need



All generations gathered as one family

other places to bring the generations together.

So we're launching *Encounter*. It's a *retreat*, not a camp.

What will happen at *Encounter*?

The retreat will provide an *encounter* with the love and life of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that is ours in Jesus. We want this encounter to be accessible and meaningful for whole families, for couples and for singles; no matter what their ages might be. There will be times of inter-generational and inter-cultural worship, meals with leisurely table fellowship, and lots of time to play. We'll also learn together through informal gatherings that focus discussion on participating with Jesus as he loves and lives within our homes, congregations, work places and schools.

In short, *Encounter* is about sharing together in the love and life of a real God in real-life situations that are fulfilling and joyous. It's a celebration; a transforming experience. It will be fun, refreshing and renewing for people of all ages, all genders and cultural backgrounds.

When and where will it happen?

The first *Encounter* retreat—called *Encounter 2008*—will be held October 9-12, 2008 (the Columbus Day weekend, from Thursday evening through Sunday noon).

It will be held at *Higher Ground Conference and Retreat Center* near West Harrison, Indiana (just west of Cincinnati, Ohio). This facility is ideal for our intergenerational retreat. It's secluded but very nice. It has a variety of lodging types—including motel-like rooms with private baths, and dormitory type rooms with bunk beds (that may be shared by families to keep costs low). There are also commercial motels nearby. We'll have leisurely group meals in Higher Ground's beautiful dining hall (where the food is excel-

lent). We'll enjoy their beautiful Family Life Center for our worship services and utilize their outstanding recreational facilities (including a state of the art football/soccer field, and an air-conditioned barn where we'll hold what we're calling *The Great Dance*). You can view the Higher Ground facilities online at www.hgcr.org/.

Who's running *Encounter 2008*, who's invited?

Encounter 2008 is a joint venture of GenMin and the district pastoral network encompassing parts of Ohio and Indiana. WCG members with their families and friends from around the United States (and beyond) are invited. *Encounter* is designed for whole families, single adults, couples—the whole church family. And non-churched spouses, relatives and friends will also feel welcome and find activities they enjoy. We'll have special arrangements for children (including nursery and children's church), teens and adults of all ages, including seniors. All generations will be able to gather as one family to worship, enjoy meals, share discussion and play together.

What's the cost?

We're working to make *Encounter 2008* family-friendly by keeping costs low (with special group pricing for families). We'll announce our price structure soon. I'm confident that everyone will find the retreat to be an outstanding value.

How can we find out more?

Watch for *Encounter 2008* updates and registration information here in *Christian Odyssey*, in *WCG Together*, and on the events calendar at the WCG website (www.wcg.org/events). In the meantime, you can email any questions or comments to WCG.Next@wcg.org. ●

Vatican II

And the Future of Church Unity

By Paul Kroll

On October 11, 1962, twenty-four hundred Roman Catholic bishops marched phalanx-style in rows of six through St. Peter's Square. Behind them strode the College of Cardinals, followed by Pope John XXIII, seated in a massive chair and carried by attendants.

The entourage trudged up the steps into the splendid basilica, and the prelates took their seats in long rows. Across the aisle sat observers from other Christian faiths, invited by the Pope to attend the proceedings.

The Second Vatican Council—the 21st ecumenical council recognized by the Roman Catholic Church—was about to begin.

Inside Vatican II

Vatican II was the largest council gathering in the church's history. The Council held 178 meetings in four successive years, adjourning Dec. 8, 1965. It produced 16 official documents. Several focused on ecumenism and unity with non-Catholic Christians.

Pope John XXIII died in 1963, after the first session. The newly elected Pope Paul VI continued Vatican II with the same goals John had proclaimed.

Vatican II transformed the church's internal

Great and present divide

Catholics and other Christians have always been in general agreement on essential teachings of their common faith—God's Trinitarian nature, the divinity of Christ, the Incarnation, Resurrection and Second Coming, and reverence for God's word.

However, it cannot be denied that deep-seated differences—doctrinal, historical, cultural and emotional—continue to divide them. "We have no illusions that the centuries-long wounds of our divisions will be quickly or easily healed," wrote Charles Colson, a Protestant, and Richard John Neuhaus, a Catholic. Problematic Catholic beliefs, especially to Protestants, include:

- Papal authority and infallibility.
- Means of grace and role of the church's sacraments.
- Relationship between Scripture and Roman Catholic tradition.
- Purgatory and devotions to the saints.
- Devotion to the Virgin Mary, her immaculate conception and bodily assumption.
- The real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.
- Identity of the Church as perceived by Catholic dogma.

“The Council acknowledged in its Decree on Ecumenism that the Holy Spirit was active in non-Catholic Christian communities.”



life¹ and inaugurated a new era in its relationships with non-Catholics. For the first time, Protestants and Eastern Orthodox were regarded as “separated brethren.”

The Council acknowledged in its Decree on Ecumenism that the Holy Spirit was active in non-Catholic Christian communities. It said all who have been baptized and justified by faith “are members of Christ's body, and have a right to be called Christian and “brothers” by the Catholic Church.

The same decree devoted a section to the strong family relationship—as “sister Churches”—that the Catholic Church believes exists between itself and the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

This past July 10, Pope Benedict XVI caused a storm of protest in the Protestant world when he released a document prepared by the Vatican's Con-

gregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The brief document in the form of five questions and answers reaffirmed “the full identity of the Church of Christ with the Catholic Church.”

Other churches were said to be “separated churches and Communities.” The document stated that though “the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as instruments of salvation,” they “suffer from defects.” The Orthodox (“oriental”) churches are considered to be “separated from full communion with the Catholic Church.” Nevertheless, they “have true sacraments” and “the apostolic succession,” and are therefore considered “sister Churches.”

Many Protestant leaders immediately roundly criticized the statement, with some claiming that ecumenism had been set back to a time before Vatican II. The document itself stated that the Vatican remained committed to ecumenical dialogue. In fact, there was little truly new in the July 10th document. Benedict had said much the same thing in a 2000 document, “Dominus Iesus.”

Perhaps some Protestants were in denial of what the Catholic Church officially believes about itself. The Vatican II Council statements, as the recent document notes, “neither changed nor intended to change” the Catholic

doctrine of the church. The Catholic Church has always understood itself to be the one church “Christ ‘established here on earth’.”

Clearly, Vatican II altered Catholic Church life in many fundamental ways and opened up dialogue between Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox churches with a new openness. However, Benedict’s recent reassertion of Roman Catholic primacy has created a new sense of realism among Protestants. How much headway in dialogue and ecumenism—not to mention any degree of unity—can be made in the future on an official level is anyone’s guess. ●

¹ One example was Vatican II’s institution of vernacular or common-language forms of the Latin mass. In July 2007, Pope Benedict XVI

authorized a wider use of the Latin version, which had been marginalized by the council’s decision.

Speaking of Life...



with Joseph Tkach

Go into any Christian bookstore—or just a general bookseller in America today—and ask for a Bible. You will be offered a bewildering choice. There are sometimes literally dozens of versions to choose from. Which one is the best? Not all that long ago, there would have been only two or three choices. For most people, a “Bible” still meant the venerable King James Version, dating back to 1611. As the old preacher once said, “if the King James Version was good enough for Jesus, it’s good enough for me.” Well, the King James is a good translation, but it is old fashioned. About 150 years ago, the Revised Version updated the King James, and then 100 years ago, the American Standard Version updated that.

More recently, about 50 years ago, the Revised Standard Version (RSV) of the Bible was published; it was a comprehensive revision of all three of the earlier versions. It still had the flavor of the old King James, but its updated language was much easier to read. It came to be widely accepted and used in many denominations. But not everyone was enthusiastic about the RSV. In some quarters, it met with vehement denunciation, labeled everything from “questionable” and “biased” to “corrupt” and “a perversion of God’s Word.”

Be that as it may, today we have more than 100 English versions in circulation. These newer versions reflect growth in biblical scholarship, including discoveries of better, more reliable copies of ancient texts, as well as changes in the English language.

So—the question remains—which translation is best? Ac-

tually, if you are looking for perfection, no version measures up. As you probably know, the Bible was originally written in ancient languages, principally Hebrew and Greek. No translation can ever be a perfect rendition of the original. It always involves compromise. However, with the exception of versions published by some sects, who doctor the text to reflect their particular beliefs, the vast majority of modern translations stand squarely within traditional Christian orthodoxy and accurately preserve the historic doctrines of the faith. So, what it comes down to is that the use of a particular translation really is a personal choice. The important thing is that we *use* whatever translations we favor and read and study it. Or to put it another way, the most effective Bible is one that is open!

But actually, there is a much more expansive way to consider the question: Which is the best version? You see, the Bible is not just a textbook, written to fill you with knowledge. It is a guide to life. So even an open, read and studied Bible is not really of much use unless its teachings are reflected in the life of the owner. The best, most influential translation is the one *you* make—by putting the Word of God into practice every day, as a light to the world. That’s the most effective and convincing translation of all! ●

This article is derived from Speaking of Life, a weekly video program presented by Joseph Tkach on the Worldwide Church of God website. You can watch it online, listen online, or download the video, audio, or text. For all these options, go to www.wcg.org/av/spol.htm.

Good Things



By John McLean

Melanie was going through a time of serious stress. Amidst family and financial problems, she still had to find the energy to go to work and take care of her children and household chores. And it all increasingly seemed just too much of a burden.

Her friends noticed the change in her demeanor. Once talkative, funny and creative, she grew withdrawn and discouraged. Normally cheerful, she became impatient and began grumbling at the people and circumstances in her life.

She wanted to change—but how? She needed a first step, a starting place.

One day Melanie heard on the radio that taking the time each night to write down three good things

she was convinced. Something as simple as taking the time to think about good things that had happened in her life each day instead of letting her mind replay negative and frustrating things had changed her focus. And pausing to give thanks for those things reoriented her thinking and priorities in positive ways.

“It changed my life,” Melanie said.

According to Dr. Martin Seligman, Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, considerable research confirms the simple truth: gratitude is one of the most, if not *the* most, significant attitude, directly connected to happiness and life satisfaction.

Ironically, our fast-paced, busy lives often leave us with little time to contemplate the good things we can be grateful for. The next task, the next chore, or the next deadline, always seems to demand our immediate attention. Owing to a culture that defines happiness as “more,” there is little wonder that we see an upswing in mental health issues and depression in our affluent Western societies. In such a frenzied quest for the “perfect” job, house, car, television, stereo—even wife and family—we will always find disappointment, because we will soon crave more or better.

Gratitude is the antidote to the anxiety and frustration of life in the “give me more” culture. True life satisfaction involves filling our minds with constructive, healthy emotions and attitudes. The Bible, of

“True life satisfaction involves filling our minds with constructive, healthy emotions and attitudes.”

that happened to her that day, and being thankful for those things, could make a positive difference. If only it were that easy, she thought. But at this point she was desperate enough to give it a try. At least it couldn't hurt, she reasoned.

After a week, she was amazed. After a month,

God's Video

By C. Baxter Kruger

course, has always affirmed gratitude as central to a whole life. Thankfulness is a fundamental response to the grace of God for and in us. But, sadly, even Christian churches can unwittingly add to life's discouragements through legalism, judgmentalism, and unrealistic expectations.

Paul wrote that it is God's will for us in Christ to "always give thanks" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Not that we necessarily give thanks *for* every circumstance, but *in* every circumstance. This is another way of describing what Jean-Pierre de Caussade, the French Jesuit, called the "sacrament of the present moment"—that is, recognizing that every moment is special and sacred because of the presence of God.

Instead of pushing on for the ever elusive "more," instead of rushing off to the next project, instead of waiting to be grateful until things finally turn out as we wish, we could choose to simply pause right now, in the present, and give thanks for what God has *already* given us in Christ.

Just take a moment to think about what you have to be grateful for. Need a hint? Consider something you can express gratitude to God for in these three areas: 1) your family and friends, 2) your school or work life, and 3) your local congregation. You might also want to try a gratitude journal, like Melanie did, in which you list three good things in your life each day that you can give thanks to God for.

This is a great place to start. But it is just a beginning, an introduction into a life-long journey of gratitude through the life-transforming presence of the risen Christ. And as we continue in faith to participate in and share the life and love of God, our whole life as a Christian becomes an expression of thanks to our gracious God. And that's a really good thing. ●



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He delivered lectures at the recent national conference of the Christian Management Association, and is working with the National Church Life Survey on the development of leadership resources.

When I was a junior in college, I was invited to go on a weekend retreat sponsored by one of the university campus ministries. They promised that a fantastic preacher was coming and that it would be a great weekend. On the first night, the preacher talked about how God was recording a video of our thoughts and actions, including all of the secret things that we hope no one ever knows about.

He went on to say that on judgment day God would pull out the video with our name on it and play it on the big screen in the sky so that everyone, including our mothers and fathers and friends, could see all our sinful thoughts and deeds. Of course, everyone over 13 was horrified and thus ready to do whatever was needed to get our video erased.

Thankfully, the Father, Son and Spirit are nothing like the "God" proclaimed by that supposed preacher. Over the years I have thought about that sermon, the horror and fear and manipulation of it all—and all in the name of Jesus.

One day a quite different version of the Lord's video came to mind. Suppose that when you die Jesus meets you and hands you a DVD entitled, "Your Life and Contribution to the Kingdom of God." He points to a TV in a private room (for the blessed Trinity abhors shame) and instructs you to play the DVD.

The screen comes on and you punch the play button, but nothing happens. You wait a minute and then another, but nothing changes. There are no pictures of your noble deeds or the years of service to the church and not even a hint of one of the great sermons you preached. The screen is simply blank. You are not sure what is going on, and while you are keenly aware of the fact that your life was anything but perfect, you do believe that you did many things for God and that at the very least there should be a few pictures.

About the time you turn to Jesus with protest in your eyes, he leans over and gives you another DVD. This one is entitled, "Not You, but Christ in You." As it plays on the screen, you begin to see how your entire life has been a participation in what Jesus and his Father were doing in the Spirit. Your life unfolds before your eyes and you see that all along Jesus has been sharing his burdens, his ideas, his dreams with you. You see that the great love that you had in your heart for your family and friends did not originate in you at all, but is the love of the Father, Son and Spirit shared with you by Jesus.

As you watch, you see his goodness, his joy, his freedom and his life emerging in and through you and your life. You see yourself and others as you have never seen yourself and others before. As you stand quite amazed and overjoyed, Jesus leans over and whispers into your ear, "Now you are ready for Heaven." Such is the kingdom of the Triune God. ●



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Redeemed from the curse of the Law:

A study of Galatians 3

By Mike Morrison

Paul was astonished that the Christians in Galatia were attracted to a “gospel” that heaped extra requirements on them. Judaizers were saying that everyone needed to keep the laws of Moses. In chapter 3 Paul explains that Christ died to *release* us from these obsolete rules.

Evidence from Scripture

Paul’s opponents were apparently saying that Scripture required people to observe the law in order to be counted as righteous. They would have cited the example of Abraham, since Jews traced the promise of salvation back to him, and traced the requirement of circumcision back to him, as well.

Paul accepts the challenge and notes that the Old Testament supports salvation by faith. **Consider Abraham**, he writes. **“He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness”** (v. 6, quoting Gen. 15:16). His faith was counted as righteousness, without any mention of the law.

Paul agrees that people need to be part of Abraham’s family, but he says that the law is not part of the deal: **Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham** (v. 7). God counted Abraham as acceptable because he believed, and he will accept everyone who believes, because they are like Abraham in this significant respect.

Paul quotes Scripture again: **The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you”** (v. 8, quoting Gen. 12:3). God promised that the Gentile nations would be blessed through Abraham. They could receive the blessing even while they were Gentiles, that is, while they were uncircumcised.

The conclusion: **So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith** (v. 9). We are blessed in the same way Abraham was: by faith.

The curse of the law

Faith is one basis for being declared righteous. Is the law is another? “No,” Paul says. **All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is writ-**

ten: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law” (v. 10, quoting Deut. 27:26).

If the law is our standard, we are under the threat of a curse. The law can point out where we failed, but it cannot pronounce us righteous; that was not its purpose.

Paul concludes, **Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, “The righteous will live by faith”** (v. 11, quoting Hab. 2:4). Habakkuk connects righteousness with faith, not with law.

These two approaches are contradictory: **The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, “The man who does these things will live by them”** (v. 12, quoting Lev. 18:5). The law requires external behavior. The problem, Paul implies, is that no one “does these things” well enough.

In a law-defined world, we are under a curse. But God has provided a solution to our dilemma: **Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree”** (v. 13, quoting Deut. 21:23). Christ, by becoming human, became our representative. On behalf of all humanity, Christ experienced the curse pronounced by the law—death. He let the law do its worst on him, but it was on our behalf. We are rescued because our representative suffered the consequences of our failure. The law has no further claim on us.

Why did he do this? **He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit** (v. 14). Christ removed humanity from the domain of law so that salvation might be given to Gentiles (and Jews) through Christ. By faith, we receive the Spirit, the guarantee of eternal life.

The law was temporary

Paul has made two points: Justification is by faith, and the law cannot exonerate us. So the obvious question is: What was the law for?

Paul begins with an illustration from everyday life: **Just as no one can set aside or add to a human**



covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case (v. 15). Once a contract has been made, neither party can change it without permission from the other.

In verse 17, Paul compares that to the covenant God made with Abraham: **What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.** God would be going back on his word if he originally gave an unconditional promise, and then later started adding conditions. The law of Moses cannot impose requirements that negate the promise of salvation.

For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise (v. 18). Law and grace are contradictory. God gave the promise to Abraham as a gift, which means that it does not come by the law.

In verse 19, Paul deals with the obvious question: **What, then, was the purpose of the law?** And he answers: **It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.** The Law of Moses was designed to be in effect only until Christ came. It was given to demonstrate that people would continue to sin even after a written law was given. The law made it obvious that humans are incapable of attaining righteousness, and that righteousness can come only as a gift.

Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law (v. 21). If the Law of Moses could give life, then God would have used it to give life. But that was not its purpose. If *any* law could give life, then God would have done it that way. But by its very nature, law cannot give life—it can only condemn.

So what was the result of the law? **The Scripture de-**

clares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin... The law made it clear that humanity needs a Savior. What was the purpose of doing that? **So that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe** (v. 22). God provided the diagnosis and the solution—and it is given (by grace) to those who believe the gospel of the crucified Messiah.

Paul summarizes: **Before this faith came** [that is, before the gospel], **we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed** (v. 23). The law held the Jews captive, giving requirements but never rescuing anyone from their tendency to sin, and this bondage lasted only until Christ came.

Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law (v. 25). The law had power in the era before Christ, showing that humans are transgressors, prisoners of sin, unable to be justified by works. But now, the law no longer has authority over us; it cannot condemn us. Christians are not to look at the law of Moses as if it has anything to do with their salvation. •

Questions for discussion

- Why would anyone want to rely on the law? (v. 10)
- In what way did Jesus become a curse? (v. 13)
- Did the covenant with Abraham have any conditions? (v. 18)
- Should we add some laws “because of transgressions” today? (v. 19) Do laws cause more transgressions, or fewer?
- Do people today make themselves “prisoners of the law” even though they are not really under the law? (v. 23)

See www.christianodyssey.org for a commentary on all of Galatians 1–3.

The Greeks had a Word for it

“antilepsis”

You don’t need to be a Greek scholar to understand the New Testament. However, the original language in which the books were written was a uniquely concise and precise mode of expression. Although it is quite possible to convey the meaning sufficiently accurately in other languages, some things do get lost in translation.

In this column, we will “unpack” one of the Greek words of the New Testament to show the fuller meaning wrapped up in the original word. Take for instance the word that is translated as “helpers,” listed along with apostles, prophets, teachers and other positions and appointments of the church in 1 Corinthians 12:28.

The Greek word Paul used to describe this position is ἀντιληψις—*antilepsis*. It is the noun form of a verb that

means “to take hold of the other side,” and that explains quite graphically what Paul means by “helpers.” Say you see someone trying to move a heavy table. You take hold of the other end and help. You see a mess that needs cleaning up, or an elderly member or a young mother needing assistance, and you step in to help by “holding up your end” of their need. Someone who “takes hold” doesn’t have to wait to be asked or officially appointed—they just help. They know what it means, and how important it is, to “share the load.”

A church can have too many people clamoring to be in the “prestigious” positions. We are warned about that in James 3:1. But there is usually a shortage of people who are willing to be helpers “on the other side”—who see someone else in need and just step in and help. •

Hmm...

Without systematic and purposeful abandonment, an organization will be overtaken by events. It will squander its best resources on things it should never have been doing or should no longer do. As a result, it will lack the resources, especially capable people, needed to exploit the opportunities that arise. Far too few businesses are willing to slough off yesterday, and as a result, far too few have resources available for tomorrow.

Peter Drucker

Seventy-five thousand people a day become Christians, according to some estimates, and two-thirds of them live in Africa. These buoyant new believers do not carry around burdens of history such as the Crusades and the Inquisition. They experience the gospel as Good News and celebrate it in new and creative forms.

Philip Yancey, *Christianity Today*

The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.

U.S. Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr.

Most of us, maybe all of us, when caught doing what is wrong, resolve or promise not to do it again. Those resolves and promises serve us well for our first few years. But not for long. After a while they begin sounding tinny in the ears of our parents and teachers and friends. And then they begin sounding tinny to us.

But confession doesn't sound tinny. Confession is a way out of the puny, self-deceiving, mulish contrivances we attempt in order to manage sin on our own. Confession is entrance into the vast world of forgiveness, encompassed with God's deliverance and steadfast love.

Eugene Petersen, *The Jesus Way*, p. 92

Some of the artists of the golden oldies era are revising their hits with new lyrics to accommodate aging baby boomers. They include:

The Bee Gees

How Can You Mend a Broken Hip.

Bobby Darin

Splish, Splash, I Was Havin' a Flash.

Roberta Flack

The First Time Ever I Forgot Your Face.

Johnny Nash

I Can't See Clearly Now.

Herman's Hermits

Mrs. Brown, You've Got a Lovely Walker.

Ringo Starr

I Get By With a Little Help From Depends.

Procol Harem

A Whiter Shade of Hair.

Abba

Denture Queen.

Helen Reddy

I Am Woman, Hear Me Snore.

Leslie Gore

It's My Procedure, and I'll Cry If I Want To.

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