



### Fluffing the Faith

Are you comfortable with your Bible? Should you be?

10



### Buddy—The Mighty Lizard Hunter

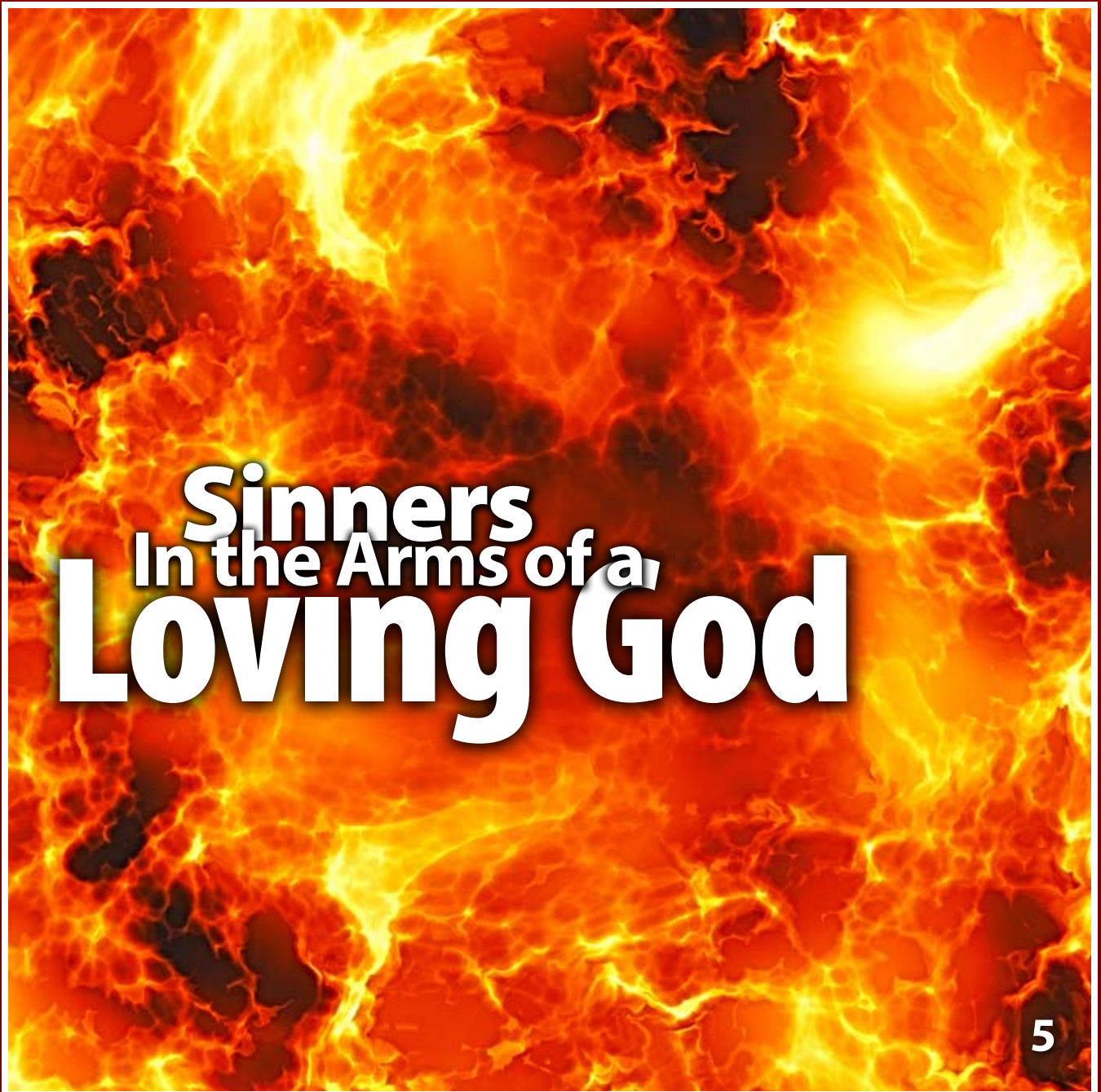
Be willing to lose your rear end.

17

# CHRISTIAN Odyssey

April/May 2008

Exploring Life and Faith



## Sinners In the Arms of a Loving God

5

# Letters to the Editor

I would like to compliment the *Odyssey* production and editorial team for producing such a quality magazine. It never ceases to amaze me how over and over again you score with yet another fine issue! As the director of a ministry that produces a newsletter only three times a year, I have a deep appreciation for the amount of careful thought, extensive research and effective writing that goes into each issue. A case in point is the December 2007-January 2008 issue. I love the articles on Christmas and especially the one on Handel's Messiah. It's a great resource for reference in writing and speaking about the season. I like the testimonials and short pithy articles as well. Keep up the good work.

**Curtis May,**  
**Director of the Office of Reconciliation Ministries**

I saw the video "Called To Be Free" about the changes in the Worldwide Church of God—it is a miracle! I cried at the end with tears of joy. I e-mailed and called Living Hope Ministries [producer of the video] to let them know how wonderful they are for all the videos they have made.

I posted a link to "Called To Be Free" on my Christian MySpace page, and I sent the link to all my Christian friends. It is the most wonderful thing I have ever heard. I would like to know, when the church found out the truth, how many people would you think trusted Christ? There is a congregation in my area, I may just attend this Sunday.

**Carol Smith**

Thank you for the free booklet on predestination. I appreciated you showing its roots

to be in Greek philosophy, and writing the booklet in language that most everyone can understand.

**D. P., California**

I really enjoy your magazine. I read it from cover to cover. I really appreciate you having a free magazine for me to read. It's really spiritually uplifting and increases my knowledge.

**AH, Minnesota**

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](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...

### *The Shack*

by William P. Young

Reviewed by Rick and Cheryl Shallenberger

Ever wondered what a conversation with God would be like? Every wonder how God would respond when you are angry with him? In *The Shack*, you will meet Mac, whose young daughter was kidnapped and murdered. In his grief, Mac is invited to the shack where his daughter lost her life. The invitation is from "Papa," the term his wife uses when speaking of God.

Mac is surprised with he meets "Papa" the first time, but it's just the beginning of surprises as he meets and interacts with the Triune God in a very personal and moving way. The weekend spent in the company of God is one he will never forget. And the weekend we spent reading this book is one we will never forget.

This book helped us see God through another person's eyes and get some answers for the tragedies we often face in our lives. By the time we were finished reading, we knew "Papa" as we'd never known him before. The book made us laugh, made us cry, made us understand people, made us understand God and made us want to get a copy of the book into as many hands as we could.

The book has great insight into a myriad of emotions we all face when we suffer a great loss or when we are going through a tragedy. And all along the way, God shows his understanding and his love. There is an

answer to everything, but sometimes the answer must wait.

The author used the story of Mac to help the reader understand that God does not cause the tragedies we face, but he uses them. He shared the love of a Father who hurts when his children are suffering but who knows that the suffering will make us stronger in some way. The book helped explain why God does not intervene in every tragedy in ways that we can see, but that he is never separate from us and will always be there to give us his strength.

The author has a gift in showing how God meets us where we are in life and reassures the reader that God is not judging us by our emotional outbursts. He created our strong emotions and he wants us to learn to use them properly. We can be honest with God about our feelings and emotions because he knows what we are thinking anyway. His goal is to live in us and help us react to things in love as he does.

The book encourages readers to take an honest look at the way they view God. Through its pages, you might find yourself rediscovering God as the Father who loves you, the Son who already did everything for you and the Spirit who wants more than anything for you to know and worship the Father and Son.

William P. Young, *The Shack*, Windblown Media.



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**Executive Editor**

Mike Feazell

**Editor**

John Halford

**Managing Editor**

Mike Morrison

**Senior Editor**

Paul Kroll

**Circulation**

Celestine Olive, Scott Wertz

**Publisher**

Worldwide Church of God

**President:** Joseph Tkach

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# CHRISTIAN Odyssey

**5 Sinners in the Arms of a Loving God**  
What is hell, is anyone going there, and if so, why?

**8 A Place Where Everybody Belongs**  
Australia's major step towards freedom and justice for all.

**10 Fluffing the Faith**  
Are you comfortable with your Bible? Should you be?

**11 Getting Real**  
Life has much more to offer than "keeping up appearances."

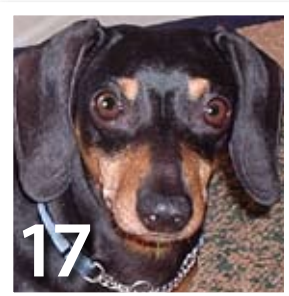
**14 Celebrating "Holland"**  
The unexpected joy of having a disabled child.

**17 Buddy the Mighty Lizard Hunter**  
Be willing to lose your rear end.

**18 Encounter 2008**  
Discover WCG next.

## Feature Articles

- |                                 |  |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>2</b> Letters to the Editor  | <b>19</b> Look Again                   |
| <b>2</b> I've Been Reading...   | <b>20</b> Crossword                    |
| <b>4</b> Editorial              | <b>21</b> Home Base                    |
| <b>7</b> In Other Words         | <b>22</b> Bible Study                  |
| <b>13</b> Speaking of Life      | <b>23</b> The Greeks Had a Word for it |
| <b>15</b> Bystander             | <b>24</b> Hmm...                       |
| <b>16</b> Church History Corner |  |



# There is a hole in my campus

By John Halford

**W**hile visiting California recently I decided to stop off at a private parochial high school where I used to teach a Bible class.

It's gone! The place where I spent so many hundreds of hours teaching, where lessons were learned, careers planned, friendships made and games played—it's vanished.

It is now just a deep hole scooped out of the ground, awaiting redevelopment. Soon, apartments and condominiums will begin to go up, and the people who live in them will have no idea that they inhabit a space where I once labored to teach ninth graders the Bible.

Well, as Ecclesiastes 3:3 reminds us, "There is a time to tear down and a time to build." But it is still unsettling to see—or rather not see—a place that was once so important to you so completely changed.

I'm sure you know what I mean. Haven't you felt that way when you revisit a house where you once lived, and see other people living in *your* space, with *their* pictures on the walls? It's their place now, and you are a visitor, or even a trespasser. But you still feel a sense of ownership. You feel there should be at least a sign saying, "I lived here. This used to be my space."

It gets even more complicated when people believe a piece of ground is God's space.

There are many

**"And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."**

such "sacred" places in the world—places of worship, old battlefields, grottos and caves. Even whole mountains and rivers have been designated "holy." Certainly some places do have a traditional and a nostalgic significance, and as such should be treated with respect. We can dedicate a building to God, and ask him to use it for holy purposes. But that is not the same as *making* it holy. Only God can do that.

What is his sign that a place is "holy"? Well, for example, in the Old Testament, God consecrated (or made holy) the Tabernacle in the wilderness and later the Temple in Jerusalem. In both cases, when they were dedicated, God sent fire from heaven. It was a sign that God was "moving in" (Exodus 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11).

After Jesus' death and resurrection, everything changed. It was time for a new Holy Place. So on the day of Pentecost, God's fire bypassed the temple and landed instead in the upper room of an ordinary house. But it did not stop there. The house was not to be the new Holy Place. The fire divided, and individual tongues of flame rested on the heads of the first Christians who were gathered there.



No longer was a building to be the Holy Place—people were. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" Paul wrote to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Buildings come and go. Some are demolished, and all eventually crumble. But God now dwells in and with the people who trust in him. "And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22).

So the old school is gone, and the students have moved on. What is still intact are the relationships I have with so many of them. I meet them sometimes, and they introduce me to their children—little images of their earlier selves who for a moment take me back to the old classrooms.

But those classrooms are now part of a landfill somewhere. They have gone forever, but the relationships that were forged in them don't have to. In fact, the only things that we can carry over from this world to the next are the relationships we build.

Relationships, unlike buildings, don't have to go in order to make room for more. That is why Jesus put such great emphasis on his people maintaining their relationships in a permanent bond of love. That kind of love, wrote Paul, "never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:8). ◻



# Sinners in the Arms of a LOVING GOD

What is hell, is anyone going there, and if so why?

**"***The world will probably be converted into...a vast ocean of fire, in which the wicked shall be overwhelmed...their heads, their eyes, their tongues, their hands, their feet, their loins, and their vitals, shall forever be full of glowing, melting fire...they shall eternally...feel the torments...without any end at all, and never, never be delivered.*"<sup>1</sup>

This scary description of an ever-burning hell comes from the pen of Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), the most influential Christian theologian of Colonial America and one of its most powerful preachers. Edwards' sermons, such as "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," taught that the unrepentant and spiritually lax would end up in an ever-burning hell-fire. One can understand why people listening to Edwards and other preachers with a similar message might, as some did, wail and shriek in horror, writhe in fearful hysteria and even go insane.

This brand of hell-fire preaching has been a long-standing and common strain woven into the fabric of the Church throughout much of its history until recent times. However, you probably won't hear a hell-fire and brimstone sermon in church today.

## Hell—to preach or not to preach?

A growing chorus of evangelical scholars—including F. F. Bruce (1910-1990), Michael Green, John Stott, John W. Wenham, to name a few—have voiced opposition to the traditional view of hell. Clark Pinnock, a Canadian theologian and biblical scholar, didn't mince words in the book *Four Views on Hell*. He wrote: "Ever-

lasting torture is intolerable from a moral point of view because it pictures God acting like a bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for his enemies whom he does not even allow to die."<sup>2</sup>

Although Pinnock has drawn fire from some of his more conservative colleagues, his view of hell-fire preaching is shared by many Christian teachers and scholars, even if they don't state their objections in such stark terms. They, like Pinnock and a growing number of others, "consider the concept of hell as endless torment in body and mind an outrageous doctrine" and a "theological and moral enormity."<sup>3</sup> Moral enormity might be an understatement when we consider the fact that some who teach an ever-burning hell also teach that God has arbitrarily chosen only a tiny minority of people for a heavenly life and has automatically, from eternity, consigned everyone else to a fearful destiny in hell forever.

Not every Christian teacher and theologian agrees that the idea of an ever-burning hell as torture chamber is a ghastly teaching. Some insist that we need more preaching about hell. Theologian Larry Dixon, writing some years ago in *Moody* magazine, decried the lack of hell-fire preaching. "When was the last time you heard a sermon on hell?" he asked. "In your witness for Christ, have you recently warned anyone about eternal judgment?"<sup>4</sup> Theologians Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson say we must "proclaim the whole counsel of God—yes, including hell—to Christians and non-Christians alike."<sup>5</sup>

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What kind of a hell does the Bible really teach and who actually ends up there?

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Dixon believes, as some Christian teachers do today and have throughout the Church's history, that people need a fear prod to get them to commit to Christ. He insists, "Self-sufficient North Americans will never really listen to the gospel if we don't at some point warn them about judgment." His view is, "If all we speak of is love and affirmation, comfortable pagans will politely listen for a while, say they were happy for us, and go on their way." He concludes by saying, "Unless they fear His wrath, many won't seek His love."<sup>6</sup>

This approach seems to assume that Americans don't already believe deep down in their psyche that some kind of "hell" exists. It appears to be a wrong assumption. In virtually every poll taken in recent years, a majority of Americans say they do believe in a real hell. According to a mid-2007 Gallup poll, 69 percent of respondents said they believed in hell. In some polls, the percentage of people expressing their belief in hell has been even higher.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, if they haven't heard about hell in church, where does a person's belief about hell come from? Ultimately, from the Bible, since the Bible is the primary source of information about hell. The problem is that a lot of misinformation has been mixed in with the bib-

ment author has something to say indirectly about hell by speaking of a future self-judgment on anyone who willfully rejects God's loving grace and the good life God has purposed from eternity to give to his human children.

Here's a passage from Matthew 25:41—from the lips of Jesus—about anyone who remains faithless: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." In Mark 9:43, he spoke about those who might "go into hell, where the fire never goes out." The book of Hebrews speaks of "a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (10:27).

Hell, then, is serious business, so we don't want to discount it, because the witness of Scripture does not do this. We must seriously think about the fact that some kind of hell does exist, whatever its nature might be, if we believe the testimony of the Bible. The question remains: What kind of a hell does the Bible really teach and who actually ends up there?

Many Christians have a legalistic view of God's relationship with humanity. They see God as a condemning Judge, who is angry with the world and throws "bad people" into the flames of hell for all

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Hell is a state of denial of who God is and who God created us to be.

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lical teaching about hell. God has been all-too-often pictured as an angry Judge, ready to toss people into the torments of hell with minimal provocation.

But that is a decidedly unbiblical view both of God and hell. The New Testament testifies that God has no intention of condemning people to "hell" out-of-hand. His goal is to *save* us from our sins and *heal* our spiritual brokenness.

### Gaining perspective on hell

When you read the New Testament, you find that hell is a decidedly minor motif. One can literally count the passages that directly speak of hell on one's fingers and toes. Yet, it is true that every New Testa-

ment author has something to say indirectly about hell by speaking of a future self-judgment on anyone who willfully rejects God's loving grace and the good life God has purposed from eternity to give to his human children.

### God is for us, not against us

The witness of Scripture gives us an entirely different picture. It tells us that the Triune God has opened the door of his accepting love for *everyone*. God, who is love (1 John 4:8), is so devoted to *saving* humanity from the destruction of sin that he took the human condition on himself. He entered his creation as a human being in the Person of his Son.

Jesus, God in the flesh, took on our fallen human nature and remade it in his perfect and righteous image, forgiving and destroying human sinfulness.

In Christ, says Paul, we are enabled “to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness,” which means we are his own work, created in Christ in his image (Ephesians 4:24). It’s all God’s doing for us and in us through Christ and by the Spirit.

Robert Farrar Capon, retired Episcopal parish priest and author of many books on important Christian themes, writes, “The old baloney about heaven being for good guys and hell for bad guys is dead wrong. Heaven is populated entirely by forgiven sinners... and hell is populated entirely by forgiven sinners. The only difference between the two groups is that those in heaven accept the forgiveness and those in hell reject it.”<sup>8</sup>

Capon’s words resonate with Scripture. In Christ, God reconciled humanity to himself even while people were still his enemies and in spiritual darkness. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,” is the way the apostle Paul puts it (Romans 5:8). Paul again says that even when people hated God in their hearts and were totally ignorant of his eternal promise for all humanity, they “were reconciled to him through the death of his Son” (verse 10).

Paul insists this gift of God’s grace and love is universal—meant for *everyone!* “God was reconciling

the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them” (2 Corinthians 5:19) is the way Paul expresses God’s merciful love for us. In fact, *everything* in heaven and earth has been reconciled to him in Christ, Paul says (Colossians 1:19-20).

What does this have to do with hell? If we’re going to talk about how anyone could end up in hell, alienated from God, we have to first understand that this is totally contrary to what God wants for everyone. That’s why he has already acted to save everyone. *No one* need ever go to hell, except by their own recalcitrant choice.

### Who’s in hell and why

“Whatever we say about hell must be said under the rubric of a universal and effective reconciliation of all things in Christ,” says Capon. “If we choose to explain *how hell can be*, we must somehow say that Jesus accepts our choosing of it *without willing us into it* in any deterministic way.”<sup>9</sup> God wants everyone to be saved, to experience forever the joy of fellowship with him. But love is not love if it is forced. God will, in the end, let us have what we really want. As C.S. Lewis wrote, “There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, ‘Thy will

Continued on page 20

## In Other Words

# Sorting the Seed

By Kalengule Kaoma

Advancements in plant genetics and engineering has brought higher yields, control of plant disease and pest control, fuller taste and better color to our fruits and vegetables. Other benefits include longer shelf life and drought-resistant crops. Scientists take time to produce good seed in order to produce more food for the world.

In her simple ways, my mother was also a plant geneticist. She analyzed our available seed and planted only those that produced a bountiful crop. She taught my siblings and me how to identify and preserve good seed and how to discard seed without potential.

Seed is not the only thing that needs careful sorting before being spread. In my mother’s language (Cibemba), there is a proverb that goes, “*Amano balondola nge mbuto.*” In English, this is close to, “*Wisdom and knowledge are harvested and preserved like good seed.*”

One ancient sage, King Solomon, encouraged his citizens to “get wisdom, get understanding; do not...swerve from them” (Proverbs 4:5). Wisdom must be preserved like good seed.



When I was young, I often heard my uncle say, “Maize seeds will always produce maize.” Of course! A farmer plants and grows only what he is expecting to harvest. Wisdom works the same way. Whatever good or bad we teach our children as families and communities or societies, that is what we will see in the lives of our offspring and their world.

The apostle Paul wrote, “Do not be mocked, you reap what you sow” (Galatians 6:7). I wonder what kind of future is in store for our communities after this generation

passes. After one good seed dies, it gives birth to many more good seeds. “*Amano balondola nge mbuto.*”

May we harvest wisdom and sow it in other people.

*Kalengule Kaoma lives in Zambia, Africa, and is the Worldwide Church of God mission director for a number of African nations.*

# “A place where everybody belongs”

By John McLean and Kerry Gubb

**A**n historic event occurred in Australia on February 13. Prime Minister Kevin Rudd opened Parliament with a bi-partisan motion of apology on behalf of the nation to the indigenous people of his country.

His apology was given in particular to what has become known as the Stolen Generations—Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander children whom the government forcibly removed from their families in a misguided attempt to integrate them into society at large. Children were thrust into institutions, interment camps, orphanages or into white foster families far from their homes and culture. This tragic policy was in force for generations—stolen generations—

“Reconciliation is where everyone feels acknowledged, welcome, accepted, needed and valued—where everyone’s story is important.”



beginning in the mid 1800s and lasting until 1970.

Prime Minister Rudd’s apology became, in effect, a National Day of Reconciliation for Australians. The Prime Minister said the apology was about the past and the future—removing the “stain on that nation’s soul” that government policy, even if well intentioned by the standards of the times, had caused. It was an essential step in the healing of the nation and going forward together into the future. Acknowledging the national desire for reconciliation, he said the apology was the beginning of a new chapter in Australia’s history.

## A sorry story

If individual relationships are complex, sometimes difficult, fraught with opportunities for misunderstanding and misperception, imagine such complexities on a national scale. Why should the current generation say sorry for the sins of the past? Weren’t some of the past actions committed with the best of intentions? According to senior journalist Paul Kelly, the apology “is an essential act of contrition and a uniquely confessional event for Australia’s soul.”

The complexities, nuances and debates are many. But cutting through to the heart of the matter is the essential element of human dignity, respect and care.

“The Stolen Generations are not intellectual curiosities—they are human beings, human beings who have been damaged deeply by the decisions of governments and parliament,” Rudd said.

Olympic gold-medal-winning athlete Cathy Freeman, whose own family has experienced the effects of the Stolen Generations (see box), captured the spirit of the apology before it was given when she said, “The apology is essential, and it is the right thing to do. Saying sorry is like opening a space for us all to become unified. If we as a nation are going to move forward, the best way is together.”

## A bridge of respect

Jenny Macklin, the indigenous affairs minister, said recently that the way forward is to tackle the prevailing problems in the community, such as the massive gap in life expectancy between Aborigines and the rest of Australia’s population. “The point of the national apology really is to provide a bridge of respect between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians,” she told Sky News Australia.

The importance of this step is hard to exaggerate. A greater respect is all many people are asking for, but greater respect is also the first step to opening and



# The soul of a nation

Cathy Freeman is one of the many national figures who affirmed the value of an official apology to the Stolen Generations. More than 2 billion people with a TV watched her light the cauldron at the opening of the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, become the 400 metres gold medallist, and then do a proud victory lap with both the Aussie and aboriginal flags. It was a euphoric moment, a proud nation united in her achievement: “the world at her feet and the soul of a nation on her back.”

Cathy Freeman is also one of many Australians whose Aboriginal forebears were forcibly removed from their homes as babies. Freeman is frank about her disgust over what has become known as the “stolen generations,” but says that an apology by Parliament will represent a healing for her family.

Cecilia Barber, Cathy’s mother, was born on Palm Island, off Townsville, northern Queensland. Cathy was taken from her mother and placed in a church-run dormitory. She said, “I will never re-



In Australia, Cathy is an emerging champion and role model of racial reconciliation. She’s also a realist. In a recent episode of *Who Do You Think You Are?*, Cathy explored her family history, which inevitably uncovered some of the colonial abuses at the heart of this apology. She became emotional, shed some tears, and then with gracious calm spoke about what we can all do in the here-and-now no longer hampered by the there-and-then.

ally understand what it is like for a mother to have to protect her child and being unable to do it. It was disgusting. Horrible.”

A landmark report in 1997 established that every indigenous family between 1910 and 1970 was affected by forcible removal of children under assimilation policies. They were placed in orphanages run by churches or charities or fostered out to be integrated into European culture.

sustaining meaningful and constructive dialogue. Saying “sorry” isn’t the end of the matter; it is more the start of an on-going process of engagement and action to deal with emotional, mental and physical problems that were caused by the government policy of separation.

Acknowledgment and true appreciation of others cost nothing economically. They do sometimes cost us our ego. We do sometimes have to admit we’ve made mistakes. And that requires a genuine humility.

It’s one thing to acknowledge that differences exist. It’s a big leap to respect those differences and to do what is possible to right the wrongs. Genuine respect opens the way to truly valuing those differences in ways that allow us to work together in harmony and hope.

## Response

On the eve of the apology, one aboriginal elder put it like this: “Sorry is about forgiveness, and forgiveness is about love.”

The apology brought back many painful memories and produced many mixed emotions. Notwithstanding the reality that not everyone supported the idea across the nation, there was nevertheless an atmosphere of rejoicing, hope and celebration that saying sorry opened a space for reconciliation, a space from which we could together forge a new and better way forward.

Tom Calma, the Social Justice Commissioner, responded to the speeches in parliament on behalf of the people of the Stolen Generations by saying that ultimately it was not about guilt and blame so much as it was about *belonging*. He said that to him personally it was about having open hearts and open minds, listening and

understanding, and treating one another with respect. He acknowledged that it was far easier to divide than unite. And echoing the Prime Minister, he said that the way forward is to offer the hand of friendship, not to proceed with closed fists.

*Reconciliation*, he said, is *where everyone belongs*—where everyone feels acknowledged, welcome, accepted, needed and valued—where everyone’s story is important; where everyone’s story contributes to the greater story.

In achieving progress to a point “where we all belong,” saying sorry is the right and necessary thing to do.

## Way forward: fair go, mate

Saying sorry has already unleashed a flood of positive emotions and good will. It’s a matter of “sorry” reflecting a national change of heart, a reconciliation that results in practical national measures that produce real improvement in the lives of indigenous Australians.

As Rudd said, in endeavoring to never repeat the mistakes of the past, the future needs to be built on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

A combined “war cabinet” approach that transcends political parties has begun. Goals are set. Australians are realizing we are not just saying “sorry” for the past, but acknowledging our own current responsibility in the present state of affairs. We all have a responsibility to work together to resolve the issues.

Kevin Rudd stated that a “fair go for all” was an expression of a core Australian value. Indigenous Australians folks haven’t been given a fair go in the past. It’s time to fix that by working together.

In a place where everybody belongs. **co**

# Fluffing the Faith

By Fraser Henderson

Once I had the perfect feather pillow. It had been beautifully shaped by years of use, and with it I slept like a student should. But then I moved to a different country, ending up in Canada. My pillow didn't come with me, so I had to buy a new one.

The thing about feather pillows is that new ones are nearly always incredibly uncomfortable. They're too big, they give you a crick in your neck and are generally unsympathetic to your midnight attempts to fluff them into a more comfortable shape.

And then there are the needles, the dozens of little feathers that poke through the surface, pricking your ear just as you're about to doze off into a contented

You can fluff a pillow, but you can't fluff a sword, especially not this one.



slumber. These you pluck out only to find yourself breathing them in and choking on them around 3 a.m. After a glass of water you get back into bed and just as the warm embrace of sleep starts to take you, the process repeats itself again.

Why do we featherians, we feather-pillow lovers, do it, you ask? Why not just grab yourself some lumpy cotton thing that doesn't include the inherent dangers of living a feather-filled life?

The trick is in persistence, because after a year or so of plucking, you end up with an ideal pillow like my original one. You remove a sufficient number of feathers and the pillow will ultimately become the perfect sleeping companion. You can get it to take any shape

necessary to accommodate your sleep preferences. Feather by feather, my new pillow is conforming to my will, and soon it will barely resemble its original prickly condition.

You may be wondering at this juncture about my point. What's all this about a pillow story and what has this got to do with our Christians faith and the Bible, which is what I really want to tell you about.

Occasionally when I'm reading through the Bible, approaching a state of spiritual satisfaction or even bliss, I'll get pricked—not by my pillow, but by the words of the Bible. It's a very uncomfortable process, usually involving God telling Israel to kill people in the Old Testament or some other passage in the New Testament that doesn't conform to my 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities. It's around this time that I get the urge to start pruning my understanding of the Bible, plucking out the feathers of discontent, as it were, to give myself a more comfortable Word of God; one that doesn't prick me just when I'm getting comfortable with it.

In our present society there is an undeniable danger of deflating the Word. So much of what occurs in the Bible seems so foreign to us, at times too harsh and at other times far too lenient. So we are tempted to pick out the prickly feathers, to remove the offending sections that poke through the otherwise acceptable Book of Life.

Hebrews tells us that "the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Often, this is exactly the opposite of what I want the Bible to do; I want it to relax me like a comfortable pillow, to reassure me that I'm not doing so bad, that I don't need to act on anything I read.

You can fluff a pillow, but you can't fluff a sword, especially not this one. Nor should we try to dull its edges. If we come to the Bible seeking the word of God, we must be prepared to be convicted as well as reassured. It will spur us to action even as it gives us rest. It's one of those mysteries God so loves. ☪

Fraser Henderson is a Ministerial Intern in Ottawa, Canada.



# Getting **REAL**

By Mike Feazell

**M**ost of us go to great lengths to look good in the eyes of others, but according to Jesus, it is only when we honestly see ourselves as we really are that we can become who God has made us to be. Life has much more to offer than the frustrating rat race of “keeping up appearances.”

## **New life**

The night Jesus was arrested, he spent some time telling the disciples about the Holy Spirit. He referred to the Holy Spirit with a word that was translated into Greek as *parakletos*, a word conveying the sense of “advocate,” “friend” or “supporter.” *Parakletos* was used to describe, for example, a person who would stand beside you in court to support you and your cause, to speak up for you, to hearten you.

Jesus knew that things were about to get hard, not just for him, but also for those who would follow him. So he said to the 11 disciples (Judas had already left to betray him), “I’ve told you these things to prepare you for rough times ahead. They are going to throw you out of the meeting places.

There will even come a time when anyone who kills you will think he’s doing God a favor. They will do these things because they never really understood the Father. I’ve told you these things so that when the time comes and they start in on you, you’ll be well-warned and ready for them” (John 16:1-4a, *Message* paraphrase).

What is it that these persecutors did not understand about the Father? For starters, they did not understand that the Father loved the world so much that he would send his Son to save it from its sins. They did not understand the “mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God...which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:9, 11). And they didn’t understand that “in him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence” (verse 12).

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**“Mercy triumphs over justice,”** James wrote in James 2:13. The kind of justice God is interested in is the kind that is tempered with mercy. Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7), and “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Matthew 9:13; 12:7).

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Jesus went on: “I didn’t tell you this earlier because I was with you every day. But now I am on my way to the One who sent me. Not one of you has asked, ‘Where are you going?’ Instead, the longer I’ve talked, the sadder you’ve become. So let me say it again, this truth: It’s better for you that I leave. If I don’t leave, the Friend won’t come. But if I go, I’ll send him to you” (John 16:4b-7, *The Message*).

The disciples were sad because Jesus was leaving them. But what they didn’t yet understand was that his going to the Father would result not in their loss of him, but rather in their union with him and with the Father. How? Because he would send the Holy Spirit, the Friend, who would draw them into the eternal relationship of love that exists between the Father and the Son.

### Sin, righteousness and judgment

“When he comes,” Jesus continued, “he’ll expose the error of the godless world’s view of sin, righteousness, and judgment: He’ll show them that their refusal to believe in me is their basic sin; that righteousness comes from above, where I am with the Father, out of their sight and control; that judgment takes place as the ruler of this godless world is brought to trial and convicted” (John 16:8-11, *The Message*).

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People who understand the grace they have received from God, are not quick to hold a grudge or to withhold forgiveness.

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*How is the world wrong about sin?* The world thinks sinners can atone for their sins by doing works of goodness. But here is the fascinating thing. Now that Jesus has come to forgive all sin and reconcile all things to God, the only kind of sin that can remain is the sin of not trusting in him who takes away all sin. The root of all sin is unbelief in God’s own atonement for human sin through Jesus Christ.

*How is the world wrong about righteousness?* The world thinks of righteousness in terms of human virtue and goodness. But here is the fascinating thing. Now that the Son of God has lived a sinless human life and has been accepted by the Father as the perfect offering of humanity in sinful humanity’s place, righteousness can be defined only in terms of the gift of God, a gift rooted in Jesus Christ, who, in our place and as one of us, did everything his Father commanded him to do for our sakes.

*How is the world wrong about judgment?* The world thinks people who endure great suffering in this world

are great sinners under God’s curse, and that people whose lives are abundant have been judged worthy and are under God’s favor. But here is the fascinating thing. Now that the Son of God has destroyed the works of the devil, the pioneer of sin, judgment can be defined only in terms of the condemnation of the god of this world, not in terms of the condemnation of the very people Jesus came to save.

But the Holy Spirit, Jesus said, would bring the truth about sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:13-14). To be forgiven of sin, to be judged righteous, and to be freed from the grip of sin are all gifts of the Father to us through Jesus Christ. We experience them only by trust in God’s word of grace and salvation, which he gives us by the Holy Spirit. In Christ, we are reconciled to the Father, partakers of Christ’s righteousness and of Christ’s union and communion with the Father.

### Getting real

In the parable of the tax collector and the Pharisee (Luke 18:9-14), Jesus illustrated the difference between the world’s view of sin, righteousness and judgment and the true view that the Spirit would lead us to see. The two men went up to the temple to pray, one a tax collector and the other a Pharisee. You can read the story. But take special notice of verse 9: Jesus told this story for the sake of those “who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else.”

Such people don’t feel the need to pray for God’s mercy like the tax collector did. But it was the tax collector, the one who saw himself before God as he really was—a sinner in great need of mercy, who “went home justified before God” (verse 14). And think about this: The tax collector had to trust God with his life, didn’t he? He knew he deserved nothing, but he trusted God to be the way God says he is: “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Exodus 34:6).

When we go to the judgment seat of God, honestly confessing our sinfulness and asking for mercy, the Judge turns out to be the Defense Attorney who turns out to have taken our crimes on himself and then declared us innocent and set us free. That is why we live in the world as people who understand grace, mercy and compassion and who devote ourselves to extending these to others.

The Prodigal Son in the Luke 15 parable knew he needed mercy, and that is all he knew, so he went to ask for it. When he did, he found out that he had had it all along—but only now that he had come home, trusting his father to be merciful, was he able to start enjoying it.

## Forgiven and forgiving

The instruction in the story of the Prodigal Son goes hand in hand with what is called the Lord's Prayer, because the Holy Spirit leads us to forgive others as he has forgiven us. Jesus told the disciples to pray, "Forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors." This is not a new form of legalism. It is, rather, a description of what life is like among those who are in Christ. People who cannot see their own condition of sinfulness, and therefore do not feel their own need for mercy, do not extend mercy to others. People who do understand the grace they have received from God, on the other hand, are not quick to hold a grudge or to withhold forgiveness. Because we are in Christ, we are forgivers and we trust God to forgive us.

When we pray, "Forgive us our debts," we do not ask as though God might not do it. In Christ, God has already forgiven us. Our asking is both a reminder of and a participation in the forgiveness we already have in Christ. In the same way, the prayer "as we forgive our debtors" is also a reminder of and a partici-

pation in our new life in Christ in which we forgive as we have been forgiven (compare Ephesians 4:32-5:1-2).

## Turn and trust

We can trust God to give us everything we need for life, godliness and salvation. Because he is the Judge, we have nothing to fear in the judgment. And more than that, God does what he does for us because it is his good pleasure to do so (Luke 12:32). He is for us.

We don't have to be prisoners of "keeping up appearances." We don't have to carry around anxiety about whether we will "make it into the kingdom." We can live carefree before God, casting all our anxieties, all our cares, upon him, because we know he cares for us (see 1 Peter 5:7).

With God, we can "get real." We can be perfectly honest with ourselves and with him. We don't have to hide anything. We can unload all our sinfulness, all our failures, all our fears on the One who loves us and gave himself for us—and who makes all things new, including us! **co**

# Speaking of Life...



with Joseph Tkach

**S**peaking and listening are not ends in themselves. They are means to an end. The real goal of communications is understanding. Just because a person feels better because they "spoke their mind" or on the other hand, think they fulfilled their obligation because they "heard him out," does not necessarily mean they have actually understood that person. And if they have not actually understood one another, they have not really communicated—they have only spoken and heard without understanding.

With God, it is different. God not only speaks his mind and hears us out, he communicates with understanding to us.

First, he gives us the Bible. The Bible is a self-disclosure from God to us. Through it, God communicates who he is, how much he loves us, the gifts he gives us, how we can come to know him, and the best way to order our lives. The Bible is a map to the abundant life God wants us to have as his children. But as great as the Bible is, it is not

his highest form of communication.

The ultimate form of communication from God is his personal revelation through Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Hebrews 1:1-3).

God communicates his love to us by becoming one of us, sharing our humanity, our pain, our trials, our sorrows, and taking our sins on himself, forgiving them all, and making a place for us with Jesus at the Father's side.

Even Jesus' name communicates God's love to us: the name "Jesus" means "God is salvation." And another name applied to Jesus, "Immanuel," means "God with us."

Jesus is not only the Son of God, but also

the Word of God, who reveals the Father and the Father's will to us. The Gospel of John tells us, "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

The will of the Father, Jesus tells us, "is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life" (John 6:40).

God himself has taken the initiative for us to come to know him, and he invites us to communicate with him personally through reading Scripture, through prayer and through fellowship with others who know him.

He already knows you. Isn't it time for you to get to know him?

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 [wgc.org/av/spol.htm](http://wgc.org/av/spol.htm)

# Celebrating “Holland”

By Brenda Gordon

“Welcome to Holland” is an insightful essay written in 1987 by Emily Perl Kingsley about the shock of giving birth to a disabled child. Kingsley compares the experience to a carefully planned and much anticipated vacation to Italy in which your plane lands not in Italy, but in Holland, a country you had not prepared for. You hadn’t read the guidebooks or studied the language. You lacked hotel and rental car reservations or even suitable clothes. You simply hadn’t planned on visiting Holland.

“I don’t know anything about Holland,” you protest when you land at the airport. “I don’t want to stay!”

But stay you must. You have no choice. You buy a new guidebook, get a dictionary, and begin learning all you can about a place in which you never wanted or expected to be. The good part is that you are not in an evil or dreadful place, just a very different place from what you’d planned. And after you’ve been there a

The will of  
God will  
never take  
you where  
the grace of  
God will not  
protect you.



Eddie and Adrian (right)

while, you begin to discover that this new country has its rewards.

I understand exactly how Emily Kingsley must have felt. She bore a child with Down Syndrome. I had one with Williams Syndrome, a different genetic condition.

The initial shock and fear fade with time. You realize that if you spend your life mourning about not

experiencing “Italy,” you will never be free to enjoy the special things about “Holland.”

My third pregnancy, at age 40, came as a shock. We had not planned to have more children. But my husband and I consoled ourselves that this would be the daughter I had always wanted. Surprise number one was that I gave birth to a son, whom we named Adrian. Then delivery was complicated by the need for a raft of unwanted procedures, this on the part of two non-interventionist parents whose two other sons had entered the world so easily.

Adrian was delivered prematurely at 33½ weeks weighing not quite 1½ kilos (just over 3 pounds) and had to be incubated in the neonatal unit. His weight gain was slow, but after five weeks he was allowed to come home. During the first night Adrian developed a strangulated bowel and vomited a stool and needed an operation to correct an inguinal hernia. There was a second hernia operation at six months and a third at 18 months.

About that time, because of Adrian’s failure to thrive, I was hospitalized with him so he could be bottle-fed on formula. The paediatrician suggested that Adrian might have Williams Syndrome—a condition we’d never heard of. Armed with discouraging xeroxed photographs of not-very-attractive-looking children, he explained that Adrian’s elfin features, slow growth, and hypercalcemia were symptomatic of a rare genetic condition that occurs in one in 7500 births, which results in retarded physical and intellectual development.

The geneticist explained that the condition results from the deletion of some genes on one of the seventh chromosome pair. She said she would prefer not to make a firm diagnosis until Adrian was at least two years old, giving us a faint hope that maybe the experts were wrong. But Adrian couldn’t even smile until nine months old—not a good sign.

That first year was hell for me. It was a time when I put God at arm’s length. I remember sitting on the bed shaking one time and saying, “I can’t do this!” The only way to survive was to give it all to God.

We waited until Adrian was three to have his condition confirmed by a diagnostic fluorescence test on his chromosomes. I had well and truly landed in

## Lunch Basket Extraordinaire

By Joyce Catherwood

Matthew 14:13-21; John 6:1-15

The bread was still hot, fresh from the hearth. I had just milled the flour the day before, then prepared dough and baked it early that morning. Soon after, my husband ran into our house instructing us to get dressed and pack a quick lunch, because he had heard that Jesus' boat was about to land on the lakeshore near our village. I grabbed some of the bread and some dried fish and put them in a basket.

I wasn't entirely prepared to spend the day listening to a rabbi. And when I realized we had to walk a distance, to a remote mountainside, I was even less enthusiastic. Besides, most religious leaders intimidated me with their superior ways and nitpicking. I wasn't in the mood to be berated. But, not having any choice, I picked up our lunch and took my son by the hand, dutifully following my husband as we scurried along the shore and up the hillside.

Thousands had gathered in a grassy area. Some were blind, some lame with twisted bodies. There were lepers, beggars, destitute individuals who felt rejected and used. The restless crowd seemed to cry out for healing and mercy. The sights, sounds and smells were overwhelming. I felt uneasy and hid behind my husband, tightly holding onto my son.

But as the day progressed and Jesus walked through the throngs of people, I watched in amazement as he compassionately touched the faces of the ill and healed them. He pulled a restored lame man to his feet and danced in joyful circles with him. He comforted those who mourned, beckoning the weary and heavy-laden to come to him. Desperate people, whose dreams had long since dried up, found fresh hope in his open arms.

A calm finally settled over the multitude; then the healer began to teach us, breathing new life into our hearts and minds. The day went by in a flash. As evening approached, Jesus realized the people were hungry and word quickly spread that food was needed. Our basket still contained five loaves and two fish. We had been standing close by, so I gave the basket to my son and gently pushed him toward Jesus and his disciples. The disciple Andrew expressed doubts whether this meager food offering would be of any help. But when my little boy presented the basket to Jesus, he bent down and with a huge grin told him this was exactly what he needed. My son ran back to us, proud as he could be.

Jesus looked up toward heaven, gave thanks and began to break the bread and divide the fish, giving portions to his disciples. They then divided those pieces and passed them down the rows of people. The supply never ran out. And there were even leftovers! I returned home on a high, regretting my earlier reluctance to come. Jesus turned my homemade barley loaves and two small fish into an unforgettable feast that fed and satisfied thousands! **co**

"Holland." He didn't walk until he was nearly four and started school with single-syllable sounds, although you wouldn't guess that now, for he is quite talkative. He is 15, and if you met him you would quickly know him and experience the love and affection that he radiates. And he is an effective evangelist! When he was seven, a teacher's aide sent home the following note:

"Today I came to school with a broken toe and couldn't wear my shoes in class. Adrian was very concerned and said to me, after giving me a big hug, "Please God, give Rose toe big kiss, make better, Amen." I was so touched I thought I would share it with you. Nobody has ever said a prayer for me."

One characteristic of "William's people" is that they are mind-readers. Certainly they are empathetic. One of the members of the church I go to told me how one day she was feeling quite depressed. As soon as Adrian walked in the door he went up to her and gave her a big hug. When my husband invites friends and science colleagues home for dinner, Adrian often makes a point of thanking God for the meal and visitors, and usually gets everyone holding hands, generally to the wry amusement of non-Christian guests.

Adrian's best friend at high school, where he is mainstreamed, is a Down's boy called Eddie. Eddie has quite severe speech difficulties, but Eddie and Adrian complement each other in their respective strengths and deficiencies. They also stick up for each other. They both attend swimming lessons after school with other special-needs friends. We mothers sit on the sidelines and watch, talk, and network.

My husband says Adrian taught him something important about God. Just as Adrian, a special-needs child, evokes our compassionate response, so do people with special *spiritual* needs, who are trapped in their self-destructive life styles. God understands their condition and how it came about. He loves all people, but the ones he finds particularly irresistible are those who admit they are "special needs" people and want his help.

In a sense, this world is an incubator for the children of God, a kind of spiritual neonatal unit in which God sees helpless individuals fighting to survive. His heart is captured by our vulnerability. God is not put off by the spiritually retarded human condition. Rather, he is drawn to it so as to alleviate it.

I have been in "Holland" for 15 years. It has become home. Here I have met others whose plans changed like mine and who could share my experience. We supported one another and some have become good friends. Sometimes I wonder what it would have been like if I had landed in Italy as planned. Would life have been easier? Would it have been rewarding? Would I have learned some of the important lessons I hold today? The journey has indeed been challenging, and at times I would (and sometimes still do) protest in frustration and concern. But what is more important is what you make of your journey. Someone wisely said: The will of God will never take you where the grace of God will not protect you. **co**

**Brenda Gordon** lives in Wellington, New Zealand.

# Irenaeus and the Second Century Church

By Paul Kroll

**I**renaeus has been called the most important Christian theologian between the apostles and the third century. He was a Greek born in Roman Proconsular Asia, today southwestern Turkey, probably between A.D. 130-140.

Raised in a worshipful Christian home, as a youth he heard and knew the bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp (c. 70-155). Irenaeus explained how Polycarp spoke of his conversations “with John [the apostle] and with the others who had seen the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

When a young man, Irenaeus migrated to Lugdunum, Gaul, modern Lyons, in France. He became a missionary to the Celts and eventually an elder in the Lyons congregation. Later, Irenaeus was ordained the second bishop of Lyons, replacing Pothinus, age 90, who had been martyred.

Irenaeus died perhaps around the end of the second century. His last known appearance occurs when he writes a firm but respectful letter of protest to Victor, the bishop of Rome between 189-199. Victor wanted to excommunicate the Christians of Asia because they kept the church’s traditional Paschal festival on Nisan 14.

## Against the heretics

His widely-circulated theological work in five books was titled *On the Detection and Refutation of the Knowledge Falsely So Called*. Written about 175-185, it exposed the heresies of various Gnostic sects, especially the most sophisticated group, the Valentinians.

Irenaeus lived too late to personally hear the apostles and their disciples speak or teach. He relied on the succession of bishops in each major city to provide a theological and faith link between himself and the apostles.

He gave special attention to the succession of bishops in the church at Rome as an example of the deposit of apostolic tradition that could be found in other churches. Irenaeus cites this succession as “a complete proof that the life-giving faith is one and the same, preserved and transmitted in truth in the church from the apostles up till now.”<sup>2</sup>

Irenaeus also relied heavily on the teaching of the New Testament to refute the claims of the heretics. He explained that in the church’s writings can be seen “the unfeigned preservation, coming down to us, of the scriptures, with a complete collection allowing

for neither addition nor subtraction.”

Irenaeus “is the first writer whose New Testament virtually corresponds to the canon that became accepted as traditional.”<sup>3</sup> He quotes from most of its writings, though he doesn’t cite Philemon, James, 2 Peter or 3 John. We can’t say whether he knew of these letters, or if he did, what his view might have been of their authority for the church.

Irenaeus was the first Christian writer to list all four Gospels as authoritative for the church. He said that through them “the tradition of the apostles, manifest in the whole world, is present in every church to be perceived by all who wish to see the truth.”

## Trinitarian theology

Irenaeus testified to the church’s Trinitarian understanding of God’s nature long before the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381) produced their traditional confessional creed. “Indeed in his various statements of faith there appear all the essentials of the Creed of Nicaea except its technical terms.”<sup>4</sup>

Irenaeus explained that the church “received from the apostles and their disciples the faith in one God the Father Almighty...and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, incarnate for our salvation, and in the Holy Spirit.” He also insisted that God’s word witnesses to the Son of God in the Incarnation being fully God as well as true man. “All the prophets and apostles and the Spirit itself” testify to this, he said.

Irenaeus believed that Jesus’ redemptive work in his Incarnation, perfect life, death and resurrection was a “Victory in Christ” over all of God’s enemies. He wrote: “[Christ] fought and was victorious...for he bound the strong man, liberated the weak, and by destroying sin endowed his creation with salvation.”

Irenaeus’ legacy is his struggle to preserve and pass on the revelation of God that had been given to the apostles whom Christ chose. It’s no wonder both the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches consider him among the special “saints” of the church and Catholics celebrate a memorial festival day in his honor each June 28th. **co**

1. Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, bk. 5.20.6.
2. Irenaeus quotes are from “On the Detection and Refutation of the Knowledge Falsely So Called,” translated by Robert M. Grant, in *Irenaeus of Lyons*.
3. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church*, pg. 81.
4. Cyril C. Richardson, editor, *Early Christian Fathers*, p. 350.





# Buddy—The Mighty Lizard Hunter

By Steve Schantz



When our children were small, we moved to the Sunshine state with no pets. Most Floridians know that while gators are our official state reptile, there are much smaller and more plentiful reptiles that we step over on a daily basis. They are those quick little lizards that scurry beneath our feet and stare at us from screened porches and lanais.

Sometimes we discover them (too late) dried up in the corner of the living room after they have crept into the house under an exterior door. Florida lizards come in almost all colors, but one of the most common is the Brown Anole.

While talking with her grandparents one day over the phone, our 3-year-old, Brianna, lamented with slight grammatical blurring, “Grandpa, my lonely pet’s a lizard!” My wife and I soon remedied this with the addition of two cockatiels and our first dachshund. The cockatiels didn’t last too long, but dachshunds wove their way into our hearts and our family albums ever since. Over the years we have kept at least one dachshund in the family, usually two, but only one is still with us in Florida.

Buddy is our 7-year-old black and tan male whose full-time calling is a search-and-destroy mission on the lizard population. Buddy is truly obsessed by lizards. I have replaced certain sections of our porch screen umpteen times over the past seven years where he tore his way through trying to snatch a fleet-footed reptile scampering on the other side of the screen. He snorts them out of cracks and crevices and away from their hiding places under shrubbery, palm boots and the shade of landscaping stone. Buddy’s pursuit is relentless, and like many a big-game hunter, he likes to display the remains of his trophy, usually right in the path of his master’s feet!

But Buddy has not always been this adept at bagging his prey. Early on in his puppy years, he would

often grab for any moving part and end up pouncing on a wriggling tail while the rest of the lizard peeled off into the sunset. (I’m afraid he has since learned to go for the jugular.) The Brown Anole can cast off its tail at will when threatened or molested. The tail “piece” continues to wiggle, attracting the attention of predators such as birds, cats (or dachshunds) while the lizard flees to safety.

The lizards have a single natural weak point in the vertebrae of the tail and a muscle arrangement at that point designed for separation. While the lizard can grow a new tail, it will be cartilage with no bone. His new tail won’t have the stripes, colors or other markings of the original and usually appears dark grayish. Since new growth takes time, you can occasionally spot a “stubby tailed” lizard shooting across the sidewalk during his “grow back” period. And if another novice like Buddy happens to get lucky and grab this little fellow again, this same lizard can repeat the process as often as needed to preserve his life. Okay, some of you are probably already ahead of me on this one...

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25).

Neat concept, isn’t it? Learning to let go of things we really don’t need in order to live another day, older, wiser, and in unique ways quicker (quicken!) as Christians. And although the new growth that replaces our scars may be different from our original spiritual “skin,” the source of that growth comes from the one who loves us and is conforming us to the image of his Son. In fact, this new growth is who we really are in Christ! It’s who we were always meant to be through the plan of our loving Father.

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Is there anything you have that you can lose in order to break free of that which holds you back? Go ahead. Pull away and live! ☺

# Encounter 2008



**T**he October/November 2007 issue of *Christian Odyssey* introduced plans for a new WCG event named **Encounter**. This article provides details for **Encounter 2008** with hopes for others in multiple locations in the years to come.

**Encounter 2008** is coming to the Cincinnati, OH, area October 10-12, 2008 (Columbus Day weekend). Hosted by Generations Ministries and Ohio Valley area churches, **Encounter 2008** offers the best of WCG festivals, family weekends, worship retreats and camp ministries.

**Encounter 2008** is for *everyone*: you, your whole church, your friends, children and grandchildren, parents. All are cordially invited. Families, married couples and singles; all age-groups and all cultures will be warmly welcomed and cared for. Non-Christian spouses, friends and relatives will feel at home. No hard sell, no frenzied activity: only joy for all in an *encounter* with Jesus.

## Encounter Jesus

**Encounter 2008** is about encountering Jesus together with others. Jesus told his followers: "On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you" (John 14:2). **Encounter 2008** will help us experience this astounding truth, which tells us that in our union with Jesus we are *adopted* as God's dear children, *included* in God's life and love and *given* a place in God's heavenly family (Ephesians 1:4-8; 2:4-6).

At **Encounter 2008** we'll enter deeply into the joy of this good news in several ways:

*Celebrating* through worship with inspiring music, drama and dynamic preaching.

*Exploring* through workshops focused on participation with Jesus in everyday life: interpersonal relation-

ships, parenting, life as a teen, senior adult, etc.

*Sharing* through fellowship at leisurely meals, times of play, prayer opportunities, music-jams, hymn and song-fests on the porch, and just "hanging-out."

We're praying and expecting that **Encounter 2008** will be a catalyst for a deeper sense of belonging and togetherness in families, homes, in congregations for children, teens, adults and seniors.

## One family: all age-groups and cultures

**Encounter 2008** brings together children, teens, young adults and older adults of all cultures to encounter Jesus together as one extended family. We have designed the weekend to be meaningful and fun for all groups:

Teens will enjoy a special event in the camp barn, a bonfire and field sports (on state-of-the-art "field turf"). Teen activities will be led by our own *Pathways* camp staff.

Children will have their own fun-filled games, play-times and classes. A nursery will be provided for toddlers during all worship services.

We'll come together as one family to share leisurely meals in a beautiful dining hall. We'll also gather for worship that is cross-generational and cross-cultural—modeling approaches you can use in your church back home.

## Beautiful surroundings

**Encounter 2008** will be held at the beautifully appointed *Higher Ground Retreat & Conference Center*



## Sharing in Jesus' Life

By C. Baxter Kruger

Christianity is not about what we do for God; it is about being a part of what Jesus is doing, about participation in the life of Jesus. And who is Jesus? He is the Father's Son. He is the one anointed in the Holy Spirit. He is the Creator and Lord, in and through and by and for whom all things were created and are sustained and reconciled. So to speak of Jesus is to speak of the one who lives in relationship with his Father, and in relationship with the Holy Spirit, and in relationship with the human race, and all creation.

Jesus is the center of it all. He has included us in his life and in his world. To participate in Jesus' life is to give ourselves to share in his relationship with his Father—not to try to create and maintain a relationship with his Father on our own. It is to share in his anointing in the Holy Spirit. And it is to share in his relationship with each and every human being, and indeed to share in his relationship with all creation.

Imagine Jesus' own free-flowing fellowship and abounding life with his Father, and his own anointing in the Holy Spirit, and his own love and relationship with

---

**Sin is essentially insisting that Jesus repent and believe in us.**

the human race and all creation coming to personal expression in and through us, until the earth and the cosmos are filled with Jesus' own life. This is the kingdom of the triune

God. And it is already here—now as much as it ever will be. Why? Because Jesus is not absent. And the Jesus who is present is not a miniature version.

Guess what keeps Jesus' life from coming to full expression in us and throughout the earth? You got it—us, the human race. In our profound darkness and confusion, we ceaselessly impose our own ideas, including and perhaps especially *religious* ideas, upon Jesus and his world. Sin is believing that Jesus is wrong about his Father, wrong about the Holy Spirit, wrong about who we are and what is happening in our lives, and wrong about the cosmos. Sin is insisting that Jesus change his view of his Father, change his view of his relationship with us and with all creation, and come believe in us, come and join us in our terrible confusion.

Sin is essentially insisting that Jesus repent and believe in us. He never will—and he loves us too much to go away. So either Jesus has lost his mind, or we have. He calls us to put our ledgers down and learn from him.

Let him teach us who we are and how his Father loves us. Let him teach us how to live in his Spirit. And let him show us how to love with his love and care for his creation with his care. **co**

located west of Cincinnati, Ohio (check out the facilities at [www.hgcr.org](http://www.hgcr.org)). *Higher Ground* is easily accessible from Interstate highways and the nearby Cincinnati-Northern Kentucky International Airport.

*Higher Ground* provides a variety of lodging types, including motel-style rooms, dorm-style rooms (with bunkbeds and group bathrooms), RV parking with hookups and campsites. If you prefer, several commercial motels are located nearby.

We'll dine together in *Higher Ground's* beautiful dining room, where the food is delicious and plentiful, served cafeteria style. Meals will include short devotionals, music and special surprises for adults and kids. Worship will be held in a comfortable worship center with nearby nursery rooms and classrooms for children.

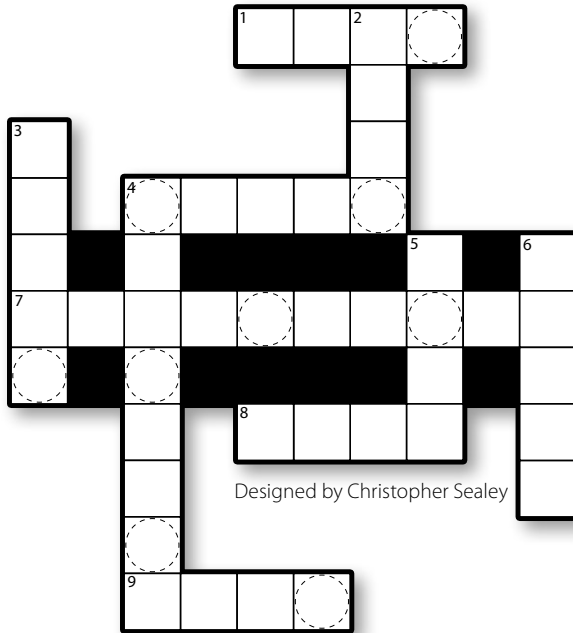
### Schedule, pricing and registration

We are expecting *Encounter 2008* to fill quickly, so register early! Registration and information forms showing pricing and the event schedule may be downloaded at [www.wcg.org/events](http://www.wcg.org/events). You may also request these forms from your pastor by emailing [George.Hart@wgc.org](mailto:George.Hart@wgc.org) or by posting a letter to: Encounter 2008, PO Box 54481, Cincinnati, OH 45254.

We've planned *Encounter 2008* to be an enjoyable event at an affordable, family-friendly price. A family of four (two adults, two children) can participate for as little as \$285.00 (food, lodging and registration). Singles can participate for as little as \$111.00. Detailed price information is available in the registration and information forms.

# Scramble Crossword Puzzle

**How to play:** Solve the crossword puzzle by first looking at the clues and unscrambling the answers. When the puzzle is complete, unscramble the circled letters to solve the Inspiration:



Designed by Christopher Sealey

**Across Clues:**

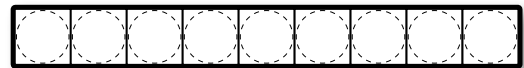
1. Not a jail
2. Free from God
7. Florida lizard
8. Only Jesus can
9. His (Jesus') goal is to save us from our ...

**Down Clues:**

2. Saving it could lose it (Matthew 16:25)
3. Jewish teacher
4. Not righteous
5. God is ... (1 John 4:8)
6. Triumphs over justice

**Inspiration:**

Inspiration Clue (page 13, column 2, paragraph 2): We can trust God to give us everything we need for life, \_\_\_\_\_ and salvation.



**Answers Across:** llhe, greac, borlnwenoa, seay, sijn. **Answers Down:** eflf, barbl, ngdeosos, evll, emcry

## Hell...

Continued from page 7

be done,' and those to whom God says, 'Thy will be done.'"<sup>10</sup>

When understood theologically, hell is not a jail or a place into which God tosses people he hates. Hell is a state of denial of who God is and who God created us to be—reconciled in Christ, in eternal relationship with him, sharing his life. Hell is refusing to accept the love of God, preferring instead the selfish world of our own making.

Those in hell are there because they want no fellowship with the God who made them and loves them. Those in heaven are there because they throw in their lot with Christ, accept him as Savior, follow him as Lord, and trust in his loving and free grace. Lewis wrote, "No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened."<sup>11</sup>

People in hell are there *in spite of* God's will for them, not because of it. They have what *they* want, not what God wants for them.

God condemns no one to hell by predetermined

decree. The testimony of Scripture gives us the gloriously good news that God our Savior "wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). He is "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

Hell is a dismal, tragic, gloomy and unnecessary disaster. It is in total contradiction to everything God wants for us. A Christian pastor once summarized what it means to be with God as opposed to choosing to be without God in hell. He said simply, "Heaven—gooooood. Hell—baaaad." Amen to that! **co**

1. Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of President Edwards*, vol. 7 (Worcester, Mass.: Isaiah Thomas, 1809), pp. 486-502.
2. William Crockett, editor, *Four Views on Hell* (Zondervan, 1992), p. 149.
3. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A Peterson, *Hell Under Fire* (Zondervan, 2004), p. 34.
4. Larry Dixon, "Whatever Happened to Hell?" *Moody magazine*, June 1993, p. 26.
5. Morgan and Peterson, p. 240.
6. *Ibid*, quotes from pgs. 28-29.
7. Gallup Poll conducted May 10-13, 2007.
8. Robert Farrar Capon, *The Mystery of Christ... And Why We Don't Get It* (Eerdmans, 1993) p. 10.
9. Robert Farrar Capon, *Between Noon and Three* (Eerdmans, 1997), p. 269.
10. C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (Simon & Schuster, 1996 edition), p. 72.
11. *Ibid*.

# The Gift

By Jeb Egbert

I have received many gifts in my life. Some were precisely what I had hoped for, while others were a disappointment. Some of them required assembly, a good deal more work than I would have liked. Some of the gifts were worth the trouble; some were not.

There is one gift, however, a gift from God, that is always worth it. “Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him,” we’re told in Psalm 127:3.

As parents or even grandparents, how do we respond to the gifts from God that are our children?

Some parents are overjoyed, eager to learn as much as possible about what is required to be an effective parent. Even though children don’t come with an instruction manual, some parents read as much as they can or seek the advice of other parents they respect.

Some of us, on the other hand, assume we know all that is necessary to be a good parent. The result is that we find ourselves in constant reaction mode as our “gift” grows and behaves in whatever manner it feels like, because we really don’t know what we’re doing.

Perhaps we are simply too busy to focus on “the gift.” We have our careers to pursue, bills to pay, meetings to attend to, maybe even ministry to participate in. And so “the gift” gets short shrift, with minimal attention or time from us.

Maybe we just delegate to others the responsibility of tending to “the gift.” Perhaps we can offload the responsibility for nurturing, teaching and cherishing the gift to someone else. Maybe someone else can play, teach and spend time with “the gift.”

Or maybe, in the worst scenario of all, “the gift” is simply not wanted at all and is discarded. Thrown away.

If we truly thought of our children as gifts directly from God, perhaps it would change our perspective about them. Perhaps the priority we would make in terms of investing our time and energy with our children would grow appreciably. Perhaps we would not be so short with our little children when they are seeking our attention at the end of a long day.

If we believed that our children were God’s personal gifts to us, we might have a greater sense of personal commitment about how we treat the gift. We might strive to learn as much as possible about how to work with our children, to help them to grow into an enduring relationship with us and ultimately with Jesus. The amount of time that we spend with “the



**Quality time doesn’t come when you want it to. Rather, it comes when your child accepts it.**

gift” would reflect the priority that the gift would have in our lives. We would take ownership of the values that our children learn and not leave it to others or the media.

Some writers have expressed a need to spend “quality time” with our children. This time can be described as time when our children receive our undivided attention, and of course, we would be apt to describe it as quality time if our children are learning from us the values that we want them to learn. But quality time doesn’t just “happen.”

Quality time is a function of the quantity of time spent. Quality time is not predictable. It doesn’t come when we, as parents, want it to. Rather, it comes when our child accepts it.

Perhaps most importantly, if we truly believe that our children are a gift to us directly and personally from God, we would cherish that gift. We would frequently thank God for such a wonderful gift, and we would love “the gift” unconditionally, just as God loves us unconditionally.

Our children...what a remarkable gift from God. **co**

**Jeb Egbert** has focused on youth ministry and education for 30 years. He has spent considerable time working in camp ministry and has taught at the secondary and post-secondary levels. He earned his Masters in Business Administration from the University of Texas in Tyler and his Doctorate in Education from Texas A & M. He is currently the Vice President of Academic Affairs for Argosy University in Southern California.

# Do Good to All

## A study of Galatians 6

By Mike Morrison

In many of his letters, Paul concludes with a list of commands. In Galatians, he gives a series of proverbs. He wants his readers to be guided by the Spirit, not a list of laws, so he gives them principles that require some thought.

### Restore a sinner gently (verses 1-5)

The Galatian Christians were probably concerned about sin—they were attracted to the law of Moses because it seemed to address the problem of misbehavior. But Paul is more concerned about the person than he is the sin: **If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.**

What kind of sin is Paul talking about—a moment of weakness, or a persistent problem? It's not clear, but it alienated the person from the community, and restoration was needed. This must be done gently by Spirit-led people, who know their own tendency to sin in other, perhaps less public ways. We should treat others the way that we want to be treated, with compassion and patience.

**Spiritual growth is a matter of cooperation, not competition.**

As brothers and sisters in the faith, we are to help one another: **Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of**

**Christ.** If you want a law, he seems to say, start with the law of helping others. Jesus served others rather than himself, and so should we. When someone is caught in a sin, we need to help the person—not make the burden heavier. This is love, which fulfills the purpose of God's law (5:14).

Paul's next proverb is a truism: **If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.** This seems to be a warning for people who think they are spiritual giants and never likely to be caught in a sin. If you think you can stand on your own, he says elsewhere, watch out, for you could fall, too (1 Cor. 10:12).

**Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else.** We are not the judge of how well other people are doing in the faith—but we should be attentive to whether we are doing what

*we* ought. We can celebrate that we have grown, but we should not take pride in being better than others. Each person has his or her own journey in life. As Paul says, **each one should carry his own load.**

On the surface, this appears to contradict what Paul said in verse 2. Are we to help one another, or to be self-reliant? Well, both. We should be attentive to our own life, but we should also help others—and we should recognize that we will sometimes fall short in our responsibilities, and will then need the help of others. Spiritual growth is a matter of cooperation, not competition.

### Supporting teachers, doing good (verses 6-10)

Paul's next proverb concerns financial support for the leaders of the church: **Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor.** When the people were spiritually immature, Paul was willing to support himself by making tents, but he also taught that believers should support those who labor in the gospel. If we want teachers to help us with their abilities, then we must help them according to *our* ability.

Paul says, **Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.** This principle could be applied in many settings; here, it seems to refer to financial support for teachers in the church. No matter how diligent our teachers are, if they have to support themselves financially, they will inevitably have less time to help others. When we give more, we receive more.

Paul applies the proverb to spiritual matters: **The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.** A self-centered life produces only material things that eventually waste away. A life curved in on itself doesn't even *want* the kind of life that God offers.

But if we are attentive to spiritual priorities, the result will be more blessings from the Spirit. This is not a matter of earning eternal life through good works—it is simply an acknowledgment that spiritual choices have results. If we focus on ourselves, our life will produce nothing of value. But if we make decisions in life following the Spirit, we will be participating in the kind of life we will enjoy forever. The Spirit



leads us and empowers us, but we still have the choice of how to live, and our decisions do have consequences.

Paul makes it clear that the works of the law cannot save us, but he has nothing against good works: **Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.** Why do we get tired of doing good? Because it doesn't always have immediate rewards. But it will eventually have good results.

Paul concludes: **Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.** Since doing good is the right way to live, we should do good not just to our friends, but to all people—and yet Paul notes that we have a special responsibility to others in the church.

In Paul's day, wealthy citizens often financed public banquets and new civic buildings: they were "doing good to all." Be a public benefactor, Paul is saying, especially within the church. If you sow generously, you will reap abundantly (2 Cor. 9:6).

### Boasting in the cross (verses 11-18)

Paul now takes the quill and writes the closing words himself, as Greek authors often did. He writes in large letters either for emphasis, or simply because he was not as skilled as the secretary in writing on porous papyrus. **See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!**

He adds a few thoughts about circumcision: **Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.** Basically, the false teachers wanted Christianity to be a sect within Judaism, and for all Gentile believers to become proselytes. They may have offered various religious reasons, but Paul says that what they really wanted was to be accepted by unbelieving Jews.

But there is an irony here: **Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.** As a former Pharisee, Paul knew the rigor involved in keeping all the laws—and these people don't have that kind of zeal, he

says. They just want to brag about bringing proselytes into the Jewish fold.

Boasting about achievements is hazardous to our spiritual health. **May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.** When we boast in the cross, we are "boasting" in our weakness, admitting that human effort ends only in death. We are proclaiming the gospel of what Christ has done.

Because of the cross, our old self is irrelevant. The new spiritual reality is that it doesn't matter whether a person is Jewish or Gentile. **Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.** In the cross, we died, and in the resurrection, we were made new. Our relationship with God is based on our connection with Christ, not on our flesh.

**Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.** The "rule" is that circumcision doesn't matter. Paul is ending with a benediction on those who accept his teaching. They are "the Israel of God." If people want to be part of Israel according to God's definition, they should ignore the flesh and trust in their new status in Christ.

**Finally,** he says, **let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.** Paul has been persecuted for Christ, and he points to his scars. If you want to look at the flesh, look at these scars as evidence that I'm trying to please God, not anyone else.

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen. ☩**

#### Questions for discussion

- Based on Paul's letter, how could believers in Galatia know whether they were "spiritual"? (v. 1)
- If I am dealing with a person caught in sin, what kind of words would help the person carry the burden? (v. 2)
- In the support I give my pastor, am I trying to please the Spirit, or have I grown weary? (vv. 8-9)
- How do I boast in the cross of Christ? (v. 14)

## The Greeks Had a Word for It

### "Καταρτίζω"

When Paul exhorted believers to "restore" a person who had sinned (Gal. 6:1), he used the Greek word *katartizō*. This comes from the Greek word *artizō* (related to the English words *artistry* and *artisan*), and the prefix *kata* (which can have a variety of meanings, but in this word conveys a sense of completeness).

This is the word that Mark uses to say that the disciples were mending or preparing their nets (Mark 1:19), and Jesus uses it for a fully trained student (Luke 6:40). In secular Greek, it was used for

a doctor setting a broken bone so that it could heal. In general, it means to make something suited for its purpose.

By using this word, Paul is putting emphasis on the solution, not the problem. "The whole atmosphere of the word lays the stress not on punishment but on cure" (William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 53). "The goal here is not punishment or expulsion of the transgressor but restoration to the person's former state" (Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 422).

Hmm...

Is not the popular idea of Christianity simply this, that Jesus Christ was a great moral teacher and that, if only we took his advice, we might be able to establish a better social order and avoid another war? Now, mind you, that is quite true; but it tells you much less than the whole truth about Christianity and it has no practical importance at all. It is quite true that, if we took Christ's advice, we should soon be living in a happier world. You need not even go as far as Christ. If we did all that...Confucius told us, we should get on a great deal better than we do. And so what?... If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, then Christianity is of no importance. There has been no lack of good advice for the last four thousand years. A bit more makes no difference.

**C. S. Lewis (1898-1963),  
Mere Christianity (1952)**

When groups of seemingly disparate people defect and band together in the way of Jesus, they form what we might call unterror cells. They secretly plot detonations of hope. They quietly conspire to set off explosions of spontaneous kindness. They plan gentle *coup d'états* to replace regimes of domination and oppression with movements of empowerment and service. In a complete overthrow of violent terrorism, they fly airplanes of generosity into towers of need and plant improvised encouragement devices by roadsides and in neighborhoods everywhere, seeking God's kingdom and God's equity.

**Brian McLaren**

There is no sin you can commit that God in Jesus hasn't forgiven already. The only way you can get yourself in permanent Dutch is to refuse forgiveness. That's hell. The old baloney about heaven being for good guys and hell for bad guys is dead wrong. Heaven is populated entirely by forgiven sinners. The

only difference between the two groups is that those in heaven accept the forgiveness and those in hell reject it.

**Robert Farrar Capon,  
The Mystery of Christ, p. 10**

Christ has no body on earth but yours, no hands but yours, no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ's compassion for the world is to look out; yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good; and yours are the hands with which he is to bless us now.

**Saint Teresa of Avila**

### Gifts that no one returns

- **Praise** for a job well done.
- **Consideration** in offering to walk in another's man's shoes.
- **Gratitude** expressed in a word, a note, a smile with meaning in it.
- **Inspiration** given to encourage another person to be all they are meant to be.
- **Offering** yourself in sharing a bit of your time, your heart, and your love willingly, behaving as if it no longer belongs to you.

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