

### Where are we now in prophecy?

Is this "the end time"? What should we be doing about it?



### She made home happy

An important lesson from an unusual epitaph.

# CHRISTIAN Odyssey

June–August 2009

Exploring Life and Faith



## Duty of Care

What is the Christian responsibility to the environment? 5

# Letters to the Editor

I read with interest your articles about the afterlife in *Christian Odyssey*. My understanding of this subject was greatly illuminated after reading the book, *Heaven*, by Randy Alcorn. He researched more than 100 books on the subject before writing his. I found it to be a captivating, and quite believable read.

**RD, email**

Please pass along my thanks to Mike Feazell for his insightful and hard-hitting article, "Grace: A License to Sin?" Like Mike, I am continually amazed by the fear of many believers that God's grace given freely to sinners will only incite them to sin more. I love Mike's line: "...as though lack of license has ever stopped anybody from sinning."

Even though God's grace and love are spoken of over and over again as the means by which believers come to enjoy freedom in

Christ, too many people seem to limit the power of God's Spirit to inspire believers in freedom to obey from the heart—instead thinking that godly freedom will somehow lead automatically to disobedience.

**LB, email**

I love your magazine, but I am in my 80s and I find the print rather small to read comfortably. Do you have any suggestions?

**AD, email**

*Some elderly readers download the issue from our website ([www.ChristianOdyssey.org](http://www.ChristianOdyssey.org)) and then increase the print size. Well, actually they probably get their grandchildren to do that for them. We are working on providing a "printer friendly" version online.*

—Editor

Thank you for your editorial and the informative article, "Creation and Evolution?"

The point is that science and a proper understanding of Scripture do not conflict.

**JM, New York**

The April-May issue focused on the resurrection. It included an article about a man who survived the bush fires in Australia. His words might well be echoed again in the resurrection: "We're alive!" None of the other details matter.

**MM, email**

Letters for this section should be addressed to "Letters to the Editor." Send your letters to Grace Communion International, 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.

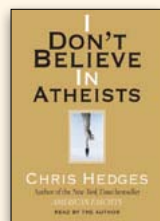
## I've Been Reading...

### *I Don't Believe in Atheists*

by Chris Hedges

Reviewed by Neil Earle

Chris Hedges is a best-selling author, a graduate of Harvard Divinity School and a Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist. He is also the son of a Presbyterian pastor from Vermont. His latest published effort, *I Don't Believe in Atheists* (New York: Free Press, 2008), exposes two dangerous mindsets, both of which are trying to shape the debate about where America's real interests as a nation lie.



The first dangerous mindset is that of the New Atheists. They are represented by culture critic Christopher Hitchens (*God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, 2007), leading evolutionist Richard Dawkins, and writer Sam Harris, author of *The End of Faith* (2004). Hedges explains that these "militant atheists," posing as religious experts, do not simply disagree with religious truth claims—they see them as evils. Dawkins openly mocks Christians who believe God had to kill his Son to atone for a talking snake who was pushing apples; Hitchens blames religion as the source of all world conflict, especially the tiny number of Muslim Jihadists; Harris pushes further and calls for a bombing run on Iran.

Hedges sees this as the reappearance of a kind of utopianism that the Western world has already experienced, most recently in the 1960s. But it is the very certainty of the New Atheists that alarms Hedges. "The nonbeliever will talk of religion as a blind man talks of color," he retorts.

Fanatics hate complexity. In essence, says Hedges, the New Atheists have succumbed to a form of fundamentalism perhaps more dangerous than the more well-known religious variety. Hedges sees both the religious and atheist fundamentalists—whether "blustering televangelists" or their cultural opposites—as pushers of "illusion and false hope." These antagonists "each claim to have discovered the absolute truth.... They trade absurdity for absurdity.... They banter back and forth in predictable sound bites. They promise simple and seductive dreams."

While Dawkins and Company hijack the concept of human evolution to elevate their brand of atheism to the level of true "progress," Christian absolutists cling to their clichés of a kingdom to descend from heaven dealing death and terror to all but them. He explains: "Evil for the Christian fundamentalist and the atheists is not something within them but an external force to be vanquished."

Hedges is not an evangelical Christian. He is more an old-style liberal humanist in the tradition of Erasmus or Albert Schweitzer. Some of his ideas are more than a little left of center. But he is on to something. As an experienced war correspondent who has confessed his own addiction to the "rush and excitement of battle," he has something important to say about extremism, no matter from which direction it is coming.

**Chris Hedges**, *I Don't Believe in Atheists* (Free Press, 2008), 224 pages. \$25.

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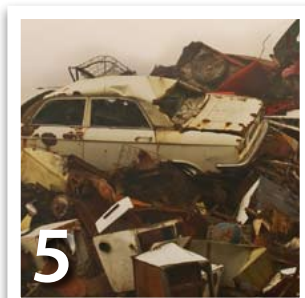
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# The Church's Leaky Basement

By John Halford

If water is coming in through your ceiling, you can put a bucket under the leak, then climb up and patch the roof. Things get more complicated if the leak is in the basement. First, you might not notice it right away. Second, basement leaks are not easily fixed.

Analysts tell us that Christian churches in the Western world are leaking badly. Attendance is falling, older members are dying and younger ones are deserting traditional worship in droves. Conservative churches are facing increasing pressure to adjust their policies on once-deplored practices such as couples living together, abortion and same-sex marriages. The roof is leaking, and it is all some churches can do to limit the damage while desperately trying to plug the leaks.

Not surprisingly then, they have not focused on the rising damp in the basement. But seeping in through seams and bubbling up through cracks, new ideas are beginning to make their presence felt. They are ideas that might actually pose a greater challenge to traditional belief than any of the more attention-grabbing problems that currently dominate the agenda. It might be a good idea to take a look down there and see what is happening.



**Have we become more concerned with sin than salvation? It would not be the first time in the 2000-year-old history of Christianity that the church has needed to realign its message with the true intent of the gospel.**

A recent study showed that the younger generation, on whom the future depends, increasingly holds traditional Christianity in contempt.<sup>1</sup> Many 16-to-29-year-olds use words such as “hypocritical,” “insensitive” and “judgmental” to describe the church. And don’t be misled by the apparent interest of the younger generation while they are in their teens. As youthful idealism gives way to the realities of adulthood, they become disillusioned. With leadership firmly in the hands of an older generation, who are more interested in maintaining the status quo, the church seems out of touch. So as many as eight out of ten young adults abandon it. Some even become hostile.

Still, although they might abandon formal, institutionalized religion, these young adults do not necessarily lose their interest in Jesus. They are attracted to his message of concern for others, living unselfishly and treating all people with mercy and respect. In him, they see a message that goes to the heart of their world’s problems. Jesus is relevant. The church is not. So they would rather be identified as a “follower of Christ” rather than a “Christian.” Many also describe themselves as “Generic Christian” rather than identify with a particular denomination.

## Losing the plot?

A growing number of writers, preachers and theologians across the whole spectrum of Christianity are telling us we have confused the physical accoutrements of the middle-class dream with spiritual success. They are urging the church to reconsider its priorities if its witness is to be credible. Instead of obsessing over questions that most people do not worry about, they are urging churches to show leadership and a united front in confronting poverty, injustice and oppression and a respect for the physical creation. This, they say, is the appropriate way to present the gospel in the 21st century.

Some of these ideas might sound threatening to conventional believers, but wouldn’t we be wise to at least give them some thoughtful consideration? They might well be, as the controversial emergent church leader Brian McLaren has suggested, the “words to a tune that you have been hearing for some time.”

A leaky basement is much harder to fix than a leaky roof. You can’t just plug the cracks from the inside. Hydrostatic pressure is relentless. The Holy Spirit is even more relentless, and Jesus said the Spirit would lead us into all truth.

Is the Spirit leading the younger generation to tell us something about our direction and priorities? Have we become more concerned with sin than salvation? It would not be the first time in the 2000-year-old history of Christianity that the church has needed to realign its message with the true intent of the gospel. ☪

<sup>1</sup>David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity* (Baker Books, 2007).

# Duty of Care

What is a Christian's responsibility toward the rest of creation?

By Dennis P. Gordon

**A**lthough he does not realize it, the outstanding British naturalist and broadcaster Sir David Attenborough inspired this article. It was something he said in an interview earlier this year.

He spoke of “the influence of the Bible’s book of Genesis, which says the Lord God said ‘go forth and multiply’ to Adam and Eve and ‘the natural world is there for you to dominate, you have dominion of the animals and plants of the world.’ That basic notion—that the world is there for us, and if it doesn’t serve our purposes it’s dispensable—has produced the devastation of vast areas. We have assumed that we can build a house on it, dig it up, put tarmac over it; that’s OK because it’s there for us.” The interview was printed in the February 19 issue of *Nature*, the most prestigious scientific magazine in the United Kingdom.

The viewpoint that Sir David was paraphrasing was based on a highly influential paper published in *Science*, the U.S. equivalent of *Nature*, by UCLA (University of California, Los Angeles) historian Lynn White in March 1967. Titled “The historical roots of our ecologic crisis,” White asserted that “Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt” for environmental damage since the Middle Ages.

## Blame Christianity

In his paper, White admitted that humans have affected nature in the communities where they lived throughout

history. In many hunter-gatherer societies, the damage may have been relatively mild, but even pre-industrial humans significantly altered the environment through the use of fire and even caused the extinction of large animals, as on Mediterranean islands, the Great Plains of America and in New Zealand.

But White’s focus was on the European West. He noted how modern science and technology originated in the West, and he linked that development, in part, to the Judeo-Christian victory over paganism—that is, since God is Creator, nature should not be worshiped and does not need to be feared. White referred to Genesis when wrote, “Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes. And, although man’s body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature; he is made in God’s image.”

White noted that in ancient times, every tree, spring, stream and hill had its guardian spirit. Before anyone cut a tree, mined a mountain or dammed a brook, it was important to make the spirit happy. However, “by destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.” People no longer cared about the environmental results of what they did, and this attitude toward nature has continued, argued White. Therefore, “We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.”



In the decades since the publication of the *Science* paper, hundreds of books and articles used White's ideas as a focal point. His ideas can be seen in the popular press, in a very diverse range of periodicals such as *Time*, *Horizon*, *The New York Times*, *The Boy Scout Handbook* and *The Sierra Club Bulletin*. Eventually, American writer Wendell Berry observed that people assume that Christianity is to blame, and it is powerless to do anything about the problem: "The culpability of Christianity in the destruction of the natural world, and uselessness of Christianity in any effort to correct that destruction, are now established clichés of the conservation movement."

### Was White right?

Since 1967, there have been numerous rebuttals of his controversial thesis. The most obvious is that ecological abuses have been done by almost every civiliza-

To understand this passage, we must read it in two ways—exegetically and christologically. That is, what does it mean in context, and how are we to understand it in light of the incarnation of God in Christ? Contextually, "dominion" represents the right to rule, in this case a transferred right, given to men and women. They bear the image of God, and must therefore rule on behalf of God. They do not rule in their own right—they must reflect the attitude that *God* has toward his creation.

And what is that? Verse 31: "And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good." His creation pleases him—and he still owns it.

### Look after it—it is good

God plainly declares: "all the earth is *mine*" (Exodus 19:5), "all the land is *mine*" (Leviticus 22:9), "every beast of the forest is *mine*, and the cattle upon a

"If you come across a bird's nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young."

—Deuteronomy 22:6–7



tion in history, not just Christian ones. Humans never needed the book of *Genesis* to justify ruining their environment. Moreover, such a reading of *Genesis* seriously misinterprets what the book means.

The 1611 Authorized Version of the Bible that generations of Christians grew up with translates the grossly misunderstood verses of *Genesis* 1:26–28 like this:

"And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.'

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

thousand hills...for the world is *mine* and the fullness thereof" (Psalm 50:10–12).

That means the redwoods of California do not belong to the government of California, the Amazonian rainforest does not belong to Brazil, and the oceans and fishes do not belong to the coastal nations and fishers of the world. They are all God's, and he likes them, and he cares about them.

This explains the command of *Genesis* 2:15: "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden *to dress it and to keep it*"—*to improve it and maintain it*. This is a stewardship role, and the principle extends beyond the Garden to the rest of creation. *Dominion* does not mean *domination*—it means royal servanthood, which was the way of life shown to us by Jesus. Although we humans have failed miserably to conform to the image of God, Jesus, the only true *Imago Dei*, was a perfect success.

To the disciples he explained: "Kings like to throw their weight around.... It's not going to be that way

with you. Let the senior among you become like the junior; let the leader act the part of the servant” (Luke 22:25–36, *The Message*).

This approach to ruling people—an expression of the command to love fellow human beings as ourselves—applies to the nonhuman creation as well. We are to help the creation, not abuse it by throwing our weight around. Though we may farm and use animals to supply our food, for example, we must not treat them cruelly or cause them unnecessary stress (see Proverbs 12:10: “A righteous man cares for the needs of his animal”).

On a larger scale, we should consider the health of our entire environment, and follow the example of the Father in keeping track of animal populations (Matthew 10:29) and ensuring their survival. Plant-eating and meat-eating animals depend on their Creator (Psalm 104:14, 21), and so do the birds (Matthew 6:26).

In one command, the Bible gives an excellent ecological principle: “If you come across a bird’s nest beside the road, either in a tree or on the ground and the mother is sitting on the young or on the eggs, do not take the mother with the young. You may take the young, but be sure to let the mother go, *so that it may go well with you*” (Deuteronomy 22:6–7).

The law against harming a mother bird is not some quirky idea inserted by an eccentric bird lover. The idea is that the mother bird will then have a chance to have more baby birds. In that way the people will not destroy the source of life, but will be living in the land in a way that can be sustained for centuries. Humans are to live on earth in a way that can be *sustained*. We should not destroy

so much habitat that various animals can no longer survive and reproduce.

This passage from Deuteronomy makes plain that sustainable environmental management is important for our own well-being—we need the “goods and services” our environment provides, too! As *Time* magazine recently pointed out, we are in danger of being the last generation to see some major species alive.

### **Rooted in our beliefs**

Lynn White was right about one thing—our attitudes toward nature are rooted in our religious beliefs: “What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them. Human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny—that is, by religion.”

Why is there an ecological crisis? At heart, the problem is *sin*.

It is helpful to notice the differences between Genesis 1 and 2. Whereas the Bible’s first chapter proclaims the one true God of Israel as the powerful Creator of everything that is, Genesis 2 is more pastoral and relational. This chapter focuses on relationships at three levels, with God, fellow humans, and the rest of creation. Then Genesis 3 shows how all of those relationships were fractured, with “thorns and thistles” being a poetic expression of the environmental results of a flawed relationship with God. God intended humanity and nature to be in harmony, but sin has disrupted the relationship.

Human sin is part of the wider context of spiritual opposition to God. Happily, the environmental distress

## *Statement on Christian Stewardship* from the National Association of Evangelicals

*We labor to protect God’s creation.*

*As we embrace our responsibility to care for God’s earth, we reaffirm the important truth that we worship only the Creator and not the creation. God gave the care of his earth and its species to our first parents. That responsibility has passed into our hands. We affirm that God-given dominion is a sacred responsibility to steward the earth and not a license to abuse the creation of which we are a part. We are not the owners of creation, but its stewards, summoned by God to “watch over and care for it” (Gen. 2:15). This implies the principle of sustainability: our uses of the Earth must be designed to conserve and renew the Earth rather than to deplete or destroy it.*

*The Bible teaches us that God is not only redeeming his people, but is also restoring the whole creation (Rom. 8:18–23). Just as we show our love for the Savior by reaching out to the lost, we believe that we show our love for the*

*Creator by caring for his creation. Because clean air, pure water, and adequate resources are crucial to public health and civic order, government has an obligation to protect its citizens from the effects of environmental degradation. This involves the urgent need to relieve human suffering caused by bad environmental practice. Because natural systems are extremely complex, human actions can have unexpected side effects. We must therefore approach our stewardship of creation with humility and caution.*

*Human beings have responsibility for creation in a variety of ways. We urge Christians to shape their personal lives in creation-friendly ways: practicing effective recycling, conserving resources, and experiencing the joy of contact with nature. We urge government to encourage fuel efficiency, reduce pollution, encourage sustainable use of natural resources, and provide for the proper care of wildlife and their natural habitats.*

experienced by creation was resolved by the death and crucifixion of Jesus, but the age to come has not yet fully arrived. So, for now, the creation “waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed” (Romans 8:19-21). But do we understand the implications of our *current* status?

The fact is, we Christians are already the children of God, and although the age to come is still in the future, we are privileged to participate in it as we live and share the gospel. Since Christians are part of God’s solution for the planet, we should be setting an example of “creation care.” Thankfully, many Christian biologists, writers, pastors and churches have been and are taking this responsibility seriously. Denominational statements expressing a theology of the environment have been issued within Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Evangelicalism (see box

Since Christians are part of God’s solution for the planet, we should be setting an example of “creation care.”



on page 7). Do an Internet search on “creation care” and you will see how active Christian environmental concern now is.

### But what about the “end times”?

Some wonder, why bother with the environment? Doesn’t the book of Revelation predict that it’s all going to go up in smoke anyway? And if so, aren’t our conserva-

tion efforts pointless? Some Christians seem to think so. A Baptist church in Boise, Idaho, prints and distributes a bumper sticker that says “Forget ‘Save the Earth’—What about your soul? The earth is going to burn, What about you?”

Revelation is a special kind of literature—apocalyptic—that uses highly symbolic, exaggerated language to communicate a theological message. The whole point of the book is that God will bring to an end the sinful, destructive ways of humanity that have polluted all of the Edenic relationships God established in Genesis 2. Let us not overlook the warning in Revelation 11:18, “the time has come...for destroying those who destroy the earth.”

Contrary to some popular ideas, God is not planning to destroy the earth after whisking the faithful out of harm’s way. Far from destroying the earth, God says

he will *transform* it. It will literally be a heavenly earth when “God dwells with man” (Revelation 21:3).

In small but positive ways, we can participate in that transformation in advance in the good things we do now and in the years ahead to be faithful stew-

ards and take care of the world that God has created and assigned us to maintain. A balanced, responsible care for the creation that has been entrusted to us is not a waste of time. It is an important step in the right direction. **co**



**Dennis Gordon** is a professional biologist and has been an ordained minister for 28 years.

Photo—iStockphoto.com

## The Greeks Had a Word for It

### Ορθοτομέω

*Orthotomeō* comes from *orthos*, meaning straight, and *temnō*, meaning to cut. We see *ortho* in English words such as orthodontist and orthodoxy; we see the root *tom* in words such as appendectomy and *atom* (something that supposedly could not be cut).

Literally, *orthotomeō* means to cut straight, a skill needed in tentmaking and other crafts. Paul uses the word in 2 Timothy 2:14 as a metaphor for accurate work in the “word of truth.” The emphasis is accuracy, not surgery. Paul is not talking about dividing the truth, nor is he talking specifically about Scripture. Rather, he

wants the gospel to be handled correctly, and that Timothy not be distracted away from its central truths.

The word is used in other Greek literature for cutting a road through a forest—the emphasis is on making a straight path, not on cutting the forest in two. In the context of 2 Timothy, Frederick Danker suggests that the word implies to “guide the word of truth along a straight path (like a road that goes straight to its goal), without being turned aside by wordy debates or impious talk” (*Greek-English Lexicon* [University of Chicago Press, 2000], 722). **co**



# Where Are We Now in Prophecy?

Is this “the end time”?  
What should we be doing about it?

By J. Michael Feazell

**W**orld events are heating up! “The beast of Revelation is about to burst onto the world scene!” Such statements are typical of the buzz phrases Bible prophecy pundits use to get people excited.

The truth is, of course, that world events have always been hot. There is always a nation planning to attack another nation, there have always been despots brutalizing their subjects, and freedom fighters have always harassed armies and terrorized civilians. These have all been going on from the dawn of civilization. The only difference today is that the world is more crowded, with its population of more than six billion, and weapons exist today that can destroy vast numbers of people in a single exchange. But the “heat” of human conflict has always been present.

In other words, the statement “world events are heating up,” is designed to stir emotions, which it does quite well, but it actually conveys nothing new or meaningful about the state of the world.

Likewise, “The beast of Revelation is about to burst onto the world scene” is an emotion-stirring statement. But once again, it is a meaningless one. The person making the statement purports to know something that no one else knows, namely, exactly who or what is the beast of Revelation, and exactly when this who or what will make itself known to the world. The truth is, the person actually knows neither, and is simply making the statement to sound dramatic, get people excited, and palm himself or herself off as speaking for God, which they are not.

## What does Jesus say?

Jesus could not have been plainer about people, believers included, knowing when he would return. He said, “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

Some prophecy “experts” say they understand we can’t know the day nor the hour, but we can, they say, know the year, or the month, or the week. Nice try, but such reasoning only points up the human tendency to prefer the titillating over the truth. It reminds me of the kind of loophole-generating excuses my kids used to try on their mother when they were teenagers. But Jesus was not playing word games; he was saying that no one would know in advance of his coming.

## What do the apostles say?

Paul was equally clear about no one knowing the timing of Jesus’ return. He wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-9:

“Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you,

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**Bible prophecy is not about puzzling through world events to “prove” that “we are living in the last days.”**

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brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

“So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a

breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Believers won't be surprised by the day of the Lord, Paul says. But the reason they won't be surprised, he tells us, is *not* because they know the time in advance—Jesus says no one will know the time in advance. Paul says that believers won't be surprised by the day of the Lord *because their hearts are in what Jesus told them to have their hearts in*. And Jesus did not say, “By this everyone will know you are my disciples, because you will be predicting the time of my return.” He said that everyone would know who his disciples are by their love for one another.

of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things” (1 Peter 1:10-13).

What did the prophets speak of? The grace that would come to you through the sufferings, resurrection and ascension of Christ, Peter says. And again, what did the




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**Since the dawn of civilization  
there have been warring  
nations, despots brutalizing  
their subjects, freedom fighters  
and terrorized civilians.**

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But it's so much easier to predict the end time than it is to love others, isn't it? The charts, the timetables, the maps, the newspaper clippings, the assigning beast heads and horns to rulers and empires—now that is not only easy, it's fun. (And if you're really good at it, you can get a lot of gullible people to send you money to “help get the warning message out.”)

But loving your neighbor? Boring.

**Focus of prophecy**

What many people don't understand is that “When?” is not the central point of Bible prophecy. The central point of prophecy is “Who?” Peter wrote:

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke

prophets speak of? “The gospel,” Peter says.

In the same way, Paul preached that the prophets were pointing toward the gospel, the atoning work of Jesus Christ for human salvation:

“We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: ‘You are my Son; today I have become your Father.’ The fact that God raised him from the dead, never to decay, is stated in these words: ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings promised to David.’

“So it is stated elsewhere: ‘You will not let your Holy One see decay.’ For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. But the one whom God raised from the dead did not see decay.

“Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. Take care that what the prophets have said does not happen to you: ‘Look, you scoffers, wonder and perish, for I am going to do something in your days that you would never believe, even if someone told you’” (Acts 13:32-42).

## Text Speak

By Barbara Dahlgren

How were the words of the prophets fulfilled? By the resurrection of Jesus, Paul says. What did the prophets warn about? Failing to believe the gospel, Paul says. In verse 27, Paul said, “The people of Jerusalem and their rulers did not recognize Jesus, yet in condemning him they fulfilled the words of the prophets that are read every Sabbath.”

The focal point of Bible prophecy is this: Who is Jesus Christ and what has he done for human salvation? Bible prophecy is *not* about puzzling through world events to “prove” that “we are living in the last days” and “Jesus will return in our generation.” Certainly, Christians have been doing such puzzling for almost 2,000 years, and they have always, every time, without fail, been wrong.

“But this time we *know* we’re in the last days,” someone will argue. “Just look at the signs.”

But the Scriptures answer simply: “No you don’t, and the fact that you’re focused on it means that you are missing the point of Christian faith.”

### Everyone in the end time

From one perspective, every Christian who has ever lived has been in the “end time.” That’s because the only

time any of us know is our own lifetime, and when our lifetime ends, our next moment is with the Lord. When you think about it that way, it doesn’t matter whether Jesus will literally return in your lifetime, because you’re going to meet him the minute you die anyway.

Realizing that, we can be free to devote ourselves to loving others, which includes spreading the gospel, instead of wasting precious time trying to figure out something Jesus plainly told us we would not know.

### What to do

What are we supposed to be doing while we wait for Jesus to return? We’re supposed to be loving one another and loving our neighbors. We’re supposed to be living and sharing the gospel. We’re *not* supposed to be obsessing over whether Jesus will return in this generation.

So if you’re looking for some good, sound biblical advice, here it is: Get on with life, forget about your charts and timetables. They are worthless, and worse than worthless, because they divert your attention from what really matters. And in case you didn’t know it, they make you obnoxious rather than make you a blessing to those around you.

Where are we now in prophecy?

Right where every Christian has always been, or at least should be—about our Father’s business. ☪

Dear BF (Best Friends),

My first encounter with text-speak came a few years ago when I received an e-mail with LOL in it. Deciphering it like some word puzzle, I concluded the meaning to be “lots of love.” I was wrong. It meant “laugh out loud.” Then someone signed a note with YBIC (your brother in Christ). Text-speak had entered the Christian community, and although I wasn’t thrilled with trying to learn another form of communication, I knew it was here to stay.

JTLYK (Just to let you know), the younger generation does not consider text-speak a minor amusement; it’s the coded language they know, embrace and accept. ATM (At the moment) millions of “Baby Boomlets” are maneuvering their fat and bony fingers with lightning speed on tiny cell-phone buttons to send encrypted messages to VBF (very best friends) and NE1 (anyone) they know. You see them doing this at meetings, in classrooms, at the mall, and secretly under the table at restaurants or at home when they feign to be having a conversation with someone else. Those of us wanting to dialogue with “tweens,” teens or young adults may have to ease out of our comfort zone.

Is it important to communicate with the younger generation in a language they understand? I guess we could take a W.C. Fields approach and say, “Go away kid, you bother me,” but somehow I don’t think that’s what Christ would do.

Jesus had a special affection for children. Children during his era, much like women, were to be seen and not heard. Yet he told his disciples to let the little children come to him and even placed a child by his side and said, “Whoever receives this child in my name receives me... for he who is least among you is the greatest” (Matthew 19:13-14; Luke 9:46-47).

Did you know that kids will tell you something in a text message they would never share with you in person? So maybe it would be wise for all of us to learn a few cryptic phrases. We already know FYI, PBJ, and RIP. Parents might want to be familiar with key abbreviations like P911 (parent alert), PRT (party), PIR (parents in room), or POS (parents over shoulder). Trust me (TM); it’s not as hard as it looks.

I send BW (best wishes) and GL (good luck) to those who want to venture into the world of text-speak. Sure your kids might LOL at your effort. Then again, if you don’t go OTT (over the top), they might say, “TUVM (Thank you very much) for caring.” Who knows? A little ILU (I love you) in a child’s message box from mom, dad, grandma or grandpa might get an ILU2 response!

YSIC,

BD ☪



# Go Ahead—Spend, Spend, Spend

By Jeb Egbert

**I**n times of great economic challenge, most people's behavior changes. They tend to pull back and be more conservative.

I'd like to challenge you to consider spending *more* during this crisis. Not more money, though. More time.

More time with your spouse, children or grandchildren.

It's interesting that when people believe they have *more* financial resources, many of the things they do can actually diminish the simplicity of time spent together. We rent movies or purchase the latest gadgets. Even going to amusement parks or to the movies not only costs money, but often does not result in additional quality time together.

But when we need to cut back for financial reasons, doors can open to more thoughtful time together. For instance, making a priority of playing board games not only doesn't cost much, but it binds the family together. It might help to create a tradition that will be remembered for years to come.



**There are so many things that can get in the way of spending time together as a family. Parents have to be intentional about using what time is available.**

My wife shared a story with me of a single mother with three pre-adolescents who had "restaurant night." Instead of going out, they took turns in pairs serving each other. Those being served got dressed up as if they were at a fine restaurant while the other two brought menus, took orders and served the meal.

Even washing the family car can be a family event that saves money and creates fun memories of "accidental" sprayings of siblings or parents.

Riding bikes together can be fun, inexpensive and provide exercise. And what about having an occasional picnic at the local park when the weather allows? One family I know made a goal of eventually visiting all the parks in their community.

My wife introduced a silly tradition that has since become a family staple. Marshmallow fight! It all happened after one Thanksgiving meal when we were settling down to enjoy some roasted marshmallows in front of the family fireplace when suddenly my wife let fly with a marshmallow that hit my teenage son right in the stomach. With that, the fight was on! All three of our children were adolescents at the time and we had a terrific time over the next 20 minutes, pelting each other and weaving and ducking as the torrent of marshmallows flew across the room. We also found marshmallows over the next few weeks in the drapes, behind chairs or in the planters.

Another favorite activity was doing word games at meal time. The idea is to get as creative as possible with names of countries. Some are imminently predictable: "Hey mom, I'm 'Hungary.'" "Okay then, let's have some 'Turkey.'" "But I'd prefer 'Chile.'" And so it goes until it morphs into the more outrageous. "Yugoslavia" is embedded in a sentence to mean "you're a slob—ia." Perhaps the most fun is watching family members become quiet as they are trying to think up the next silly sentence.

Sometimes that game shifts to making up silly names. My daughter will ask during dinner, "Hey dad. Have you met my friend Rick?" "No," I reply. "Oh," she says. "His last name is O'Shay. Rick O'Shay." That is followed by "Phil Erup," and "Larry N. Gitis."

An idea that used to be fashionable was having a barbecue and making homemade ice cream. Chances are, grandparents still know how to do that and can enlist the help of their grandchildren to do some of the work on this fun project.

The point is that there are so many things that can get in the way of spending time together as a family. Parents have to be intentional about using what time is available. While financial resources may be shrinking, our allotment of time remains.

So go ahead. Spend, spend, spend! Spend as much time as you can with your family. Make it fun. Build traditions and memories that will last a lifetime! ☺

# New Glory

How becoming a citizen helped understand the Christian faith better.

By John Halford

**W**hen Jesus died, rose and ascended to the Father, he established a new relationship between humanity and God—a new covenant. No longer would we need to relate to God through laws, ordinances, sacrifices and ritual. Through Jesus, we can talk to God as son or daughter to a Father. We are part of the family—God’s beloved children.

Sometimes this new relationship seems too good to be true. Are the barriers really removed? Can we really come “boldly before the throne of grace” as if we belonged there?

This can be particularly difficult for people who have taken their “religion” very seriously. Even though we might understand grace with our heads, some of the old habits, fears and phobias, deeply etched through years of legalism, remain in our hearts. How exactly should we relate to God and his law under this new covenant? It was easy when we could measure righteousness with days observed, unclean food not eaten and time spent on our knees. What does God expect us to do *now*?

About a year ago I had an experience that helped me sort this out—I became an American citizen.

Anyone who has ever sought citizenship of another country, be it the USA, Australia or wherever, knows it is not to be taken lightly. You commit yourself to a lengthy, quite expensive and sometimes rather nerve-wracking series of events. Why did I do it?

I didn’t need to. I was a Permanent Resident, a status that allowed me to live and work in the USA as long as I lived, providing I obeyed the law, paid my taxes and didn’t engage in “un-American activities.” But I was still a foreigner, classified as an “alien.” The longer I lived in the States the more I realized that I identified with the best of American values and way of life. I was accepted, but I was still on the outside, looking in. I was not content to be an alien. I wanted to belong. So I took the plunge and began the process of what is called “naturalization.”

## Lengthy process

The naturalization process can take anywhere from a few months to more than a year. The first step is to be fingerprinted, presumably to make sure you are not on somebody’s “undesirables” list. A few weeks later you are summoned to an interview with an Immigration Officer. You are tested for your ability to speak and write English, and given a basic but thorough test of American history, geography and U.S. government and law. I suspect that in preparing for this test, most potential citizens end up knowing more about the USA than people who have lived here all their lives.

At all times I found the Immigration department’s personnel courteous, respectful and fair, but they were not overly friendly. They have a responsibility, because not all who apply to live in America have the best interests of the country at heart.



**What I remember most about that day was an exhilarating sense of belonging. This was my country now.**

I passed the interview and test with flying colors. But I was not finished yet. Before my citizenship could be approved, there had to be a very thorough background check by the FBI. This, the officer warned me, might take a few months. “And remember,” she cautioned, “You are not a citizen yet.” She was only doing her job, but as I left her office, I felt more “alien” than ever.

In some ways the next few months were the hardest. Even if you are a law-abiding person, knowing the FBI is investigating you is unnerving. But eventually I received notification that I had been approved, with a notice to show up in five weeks at the courthouse in Indianapolis for the naturalization ceremony. Howev-

er, this mostly upbeat notice carried one last caution. On the day of naturalization, I had to declare any and all infringements of the law I had committed between the time the FBI had finished their check and the actual ceremony.

I became very conscious of “the law” in those last few weeks. I didn’t want anything to go wrong after I had come so far. I tried to do everything—and I do mean everything—right. I became conscious of every rule, regulation and minor by-law. I drove slowly, parked legally and triple-checked my luggage for forbidden items before I flew anywhere. I became the quintessential legalist.

### Alien no longer

On the day of the swearing in, I drove (very carefully) up to Indianapolis and joined 82 other potential citizens in the courthouse. Almost immediately I noticed a change of atmosphere. The usually formal officials were smiling and welcoming. The judge who administered the oath of allegiance was relaxed and friendly. He spent some time explaining what citizenship meant in very positive terms. My wife, who is a natural-born citizen, told me later that it reminded her of many things she had always taken for granted.

The judge explained that we were no longer “aliens.” We would now become fully fledged Americans, with the same rights, privileges and responsibilities as every other citizen, except that we could not

run for President. (You do have to be born here to do that—but that’s okay. I wasn’t planning on it.) He encouraged us to “make our citizenship count.” And then we—a disparate group of Mexicans, Chinese, Egyptians, two Russians, several Indians, four Nigerians, one German and me, an

Englishman—recited the Oath of Allegiance together and became America’s newest citizens.

What I remember most about that day was an exhilarating sense of belonging. This was my country now. Old Glory was *my* flag, and I had one ready to put up outside my house as soon as I got home. The world outside the courthouse was much the same as when I went in, but for me, everything had changed.

I do, of course, love and enjoy my other country—The United States allows people to hold dual citizenship. But I still feel a buzz as I offer my American passport to the Immigration office when I come home from travels. Or when I use the personal pronouns—“our,” “we” and “my”—when I talk about America.

What I really noticed was how my relationship to the law changed. I no longer lived in fear of making a small mistake. That didn’t mean I could have a careless disregard for it. My new status as citizen did not permit me to do whatever I liked. To the contrary, now I had an even stronger desire to uphold the law and to avoid anything that might harm my new country. I noticed that I winced when America was criticized, and I often speak up in her defense when I hear disparaging comments.

In short, my whole attitude toward the law changed from one of caution and even fear to one of support. I now wanted not merely to avoid breaking the law, but to live up to the very finest ideals of my adopted country. It was not a case of having to—but of *wanting* to. I wanted to “make my citizenship count.”

### Citizenship in heaven

So what has this got to do with you? Most readers have no need or desire to seek citizenship of another country. However, if you have become a Christian you have been granted citizenship in the kingdom of God. “Our citizenship is in heaven,” Paul reminded the church at Philippi (Philippians 3:20). “You are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone,” he wrote to the Christians at Ephesus (Ephesians 2:19-20).

Many if not most of these people were Gentiles, and it was hard for those who came from a Jewish background to hear this. After all, they, the Jews, were the chosen people, with whom God had made the original “old” covenant. Didn’t that give them some advantage? But this Paul fellow seemed to have a rather cavalier attitude toward their cherished laws and traditions. Surely these Gentiles had to do *something*.

They had misunderstood. Neither Paul, nor Jesus before him, gave anyone permission to break the law, or even to regard it lightly. “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good,” wrote Paul to the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome (Romans 7:12). He wanted them to understand that citizens of the kingdom of God can have an entirely different approach to obeying God. It was no longer

Jesus paid for our transgressions, past, present and future. But does that mean we can lie, steal, kill and commit adultery with no fear of penalty?

necessary to live in nagging fear, or to assuage guilt by offering a sacrifice. Your status as a citizen is not in danger. No heavenly FBI is checking up on you. You belong—you are included in all God’s plans, and he has in Jesus established an unbreakable bond with you.

It takes time to fully appreciate this, especially if you have had a different relationship with God and his law. Even Peter, a man who had known Jesus intimately, but who took his traditional religious observances seriously, had difficulty at first. The New Testament tells us how, many years after Jesus had ascended to heaven, it still took a special miracle to convince Peter that “unclean” Gentiles should be included as fully fledged citizens of the kingdom (Acts 10).

However, when he did finally get it, he wrote confidently to all who were Christians, “You are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God’s instruments to do his work and speak out for him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference he made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted (1 Peter 2:9-10, *Message Bible*).

We no longer have to tiptoe through life, treating the law of God as an obstacle course. But neither can we swagger around, abusing our status as citizens to do whatever we like, under the umbrella of “grace.” Jesus paid the penalty for our transgressions, past, present and future. But does that mean we can lie, steal, kill and commit adultery with no fear of penalty?

If someone were to say to me, “Now that you are an American citizen, you can break the laws, cheat on your taxes, show disrespect to the flag and do things that subvert the country if you want to,” I would reply, “That is the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard. Why would I want to do those things?” I want, as the

judge exhorted at the naturalization ceremony, to “make my citizenship count.” I want to do all I can to uphold, strengthen, support and be an asset to my new country.

So why would a citizen of the kingdom of God want to live contrary to its laws and way of life as revealed by Jesus? The answer to “how much can we get away with?” is “Why would we want to ‘get away’ with anything?” It becomes a stupid question.

It is not a case of “how much do I now have to do?” Rather, it is, “How do I live my life in the best interests of the kingdom of God? Not because I am afraid of it, but because I love it, identify with it, and want other people to know what it is like.” ☪

**My whole attitude toward the law changed. I now wanted to not merely avoid breaking the law, but to live up to the finest ideals of my adopted country.**

## In Other Words

# Ever Seen Roasted Corn Grow?

By Kalengule Kaoma

In Southern Africa, we enjoy green maize, or corn, during the summer months. We eat it roasted, cooked, steamed, pounded, or grilled. Having just finished some roasted corn, my thoughts turned to a saying of the Kiluba people of the Democratic Republic of Congo. They say “*Mataba makange amenanga*.” The English equivalent is: “Roasted maize (corn) grows.”



As I crunched a few more bites of roasted corn, I pondered the saying. Literally speaking, of course, only fresh corn grows, not roasted corn. But it takes caring hands to roast corn, and that’s the point of the proverb. Roast corn is a metaphor for good deeds, and like seeds sown in fertile soil, good deeds will germinate, grow, and

bear more good deeds.

Wise King Solomon had the same lesson in mind when he wrote, “Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again” (Ecclesiastes 11:1).

For a few days while I stayed in Lubumbashi, I interacted with a number of Kiluba people. Their generosity certainly reflected their proverb, “Roasted maize grows.”

All of us, including the Kiluba, have a lot to learn about good deeds, of course. But in the meantime, all of us can practice roasting some

corn with full assurance that it will grow!

Do something good for someone. That person will remember your caring hands and perhaps do something for someone else.

“Do for other people as you would like them to do for you,” Jesus said. That’s how roasted corn grows. ☪

# She Made Home Happy

An important lesson from an unusual epitaph.

By Kenda Turner

“Axsher. Now *there’s* a name for your baby,” I teased. Pausing before a prominent graveyard monument, my pregnant friend laughed and said, “I’ll have to think about that one.”

Although we were visiting the pioneer cemetery to study local history, we also found ourselves chuckling over unusual names. Standing in warm sunlight and touched by a light breeze, we continued to inspect the marker’s chiseled words:

*Axsher, wife of  
David Bevis.  
Died October 29, 1894  
Aged 78 years.*

Then in a hushed moment of discovery, when even the breeze seemed to stand still, we were jolted by the epitaph:

*She made home happy.*

“She made home happy.” My heart skipped a beat. A recent memory of a time in which my home hadn’t been all that happy popped in my head. Who was this woman for whom such a testimony could be engraved in stone? Intrigued, I went home determined to learn about Axsher Bevis.

A bit of research revealed interesting facts. In 1816, Axsher Bevis was born Axsher Stout, the fourth of 12 children. In 1836, she married David Bevis, himself the fourth of 12 children. Together they had 12 children of their own!

Further investigation showed that Axsher married into an active extended family that owned several businesses, including a hotel, general store, and sawmill. And by 1860, Axsher faced the turbulent Civil War years with army-aged sons, married daughters, and eight younger children, including an infant. Yet with all her responsibilities—mine pale in comparison—she was remembered for making home happy. What was her secret?

I stumbled upon a convincing possibility in a quiet obscure fact. In 1842, the Bevis family donated land for a church to be built. Axsher was one of the

church’s original members. And in family historical notes, a grandson fondly remembered how the family was “accustomed to gather” in Axsher’s home on Sundays after church.

Axsher’s legacy was rooted in a Christian heritage. This discovery stirred my imagination. I began to picture her in her (few) quiet moments with an opened Bible before her. What verses, I wondered, inspired her most? Perhaps ones like Philippians 4:4: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Or maybe 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances.” I could almost hear the music: “Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise” (James 5:13). Verses on kindness, forgiveness and love would have influenced her as well. The key to Axsher’s happy home, I concluded, was her faith in God’s word.



Of course Axsher’s life would not have been all song and smiles. She’d have had her share of hurts and loss. But Axsher’s faith would have taken her beyond just inspiration. Her faith, coupled with hope, would have led her to Jesus, the “author and perfecter of our faith who for the joy set before him endured the cross” (Romans 12:2). In him Axsher would find

true joy—the master key to a happy home.

Incidentally, conclusive evidence could not be found on the origin of Axsher’s name. But I learned that a close form, *Asher*, means “happy one” in Hebrew. What a coincidence!

Axsher. An unusual name and a curious inscription led from one woman’s inspirational legacy to a valuable personal reminder. A happy home comes from God’s word imbedded in our hearts and lived out daily through his presence and promise. And though the epitaph “she made home happy” may never be chiseled on my stone—or yours—we can look forward to the day when we hear the most desired words of all: “Well done, good and faithful servant...come and share your master’s happiness” (Matthew 25:21). co



# A Message the World **Forgot**

Forty years ago, two men land on the moon. One of them spoke unforgettable words. The other did something equally momentous.

By Neil Earle

In the summer of 1969 the news was literally out of this world. Though we have always been space travelers—our planet logs millions of miles every day—the landing of Apollo 11 on the moon was truly a turning point.

Pictures of our sparkling blue planet suspended above a bleak lunar surface underscored an already growing sense of the fragility of “Spaceship Earth” in the vast cosmos. The first Earth Day quickly followed on April 22, 1970.

Canadian thinker Marshall McLuhan called for a new commitment to environmental responsibility, observing that “on Spaceship Earth there are no passengers; everybody is a member of the crew. We have moved into an age in which everybody’s activities affect everybody else.”

Books such as *The Limits to Growth*, *Small Is Beautiful* and *If You Love This Planet* helped birth the phrase “quality of life.” The anti-nuclear movement, the New Age movement, micro-circuitry and science fiction were all given a boost by the Apollo 11 images of human beings investigating the lunar dust.

But something even more fundamental to the quality of life was on the mind of Apollo 11 crew member Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin that unforgettable July 20, 1969.

## What is man?

Earlier, in December 1968, the crew of Apollo 8 had drawn legal fire from atheist groups for reading from Genesis 1 while they orbited the moon on Christmas Eve. Broadcasting a reading from a religious book during a government-sponsored space mission seemed to some Americans to compromise the separation of religion and state. To avoid more



Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin in the Lunar Module

Buzz Aldrin had somehow wedged into his stowage pouch a plastic bag. In it were a small flask of wine, a chalice and some wafers.

legal problems over the issue, NASA asked the Apollo 11 crew not to recite any scriptures. (On a humorous note, one judge eventually threw out a legal challenge filed against Apollo 8 by claiming that the event “was out of his jurisdiction.”)

An Episcopalian, Buzz Aldrin had somehow wedged into his stowage pouch a plastic bag. In it were a small flask of wine, a chalice and some wafers. About 5:57 p.m. Houston time, he set the elements on the fold-down guidance-computer table. He spoke

*Continues page 19*

# Confessions of a Youth Evangelist

It was the right idea, but the focus was wrong.

By Greg Williams

I have worked for more than a decade with an organization that focuses on sharing the good news about Jesus with teenagers. It has been a privilege to work with people who face up to the challenge of engaging teens in the ever-changing youth culture. I think we have done some good work. But lately I have been wondering if I need to look at my approach towards sharing Jesus with young people—or any age group, for that matter.

Organizations and para-church ministries that specialize in youth evangelism use a combination of relational connections, events and programs to interact with teens. I have been trained, and now train others, to extend grace to non-believing young people

**Jesus has helped me value all relationships, and he has set me free to trust him to work and move in people's lives.**

by spending time, listening to and developing a trusting relationship with them.

The goal then is to match the young person's story to God's story and intro-

duce them to Jesus. My experience has shown me that this is a grace-filled, effective way to share the gospel.

Okay, so where is the problem? Actually, I think there are two. One is a wrong component, and the other is a missing component. The wrong component is using the relationship as a means to an end. The missing component is that there is no acknowledgment of the presence and power of Jesus *already* at work in the encounter.

## People are not projects

Since all humans are children of God, relationships have inherent value and must be handled with care and respect. Relationships are to be honored and



cherished *for the sake of the relationship*. They are not to be developed and used as a means to an end.

Leadership guru John Maxwell taught me several years ago that leadership is summed up in one word—"influence." I embraced the idea that if I made the effort to love sacrificially over a period of time, and if I demonstrated a life of love, joy, peace and so on, eventually I would win the right to share my well-rehearsed gospel presentation with others. This approach was all about influence, leverage and presentation. It sounds like a sales scheme, and it felt like one as well.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore

you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

As one evangelist to another, Paul tells me that I represent Jesus and I have the pleasure of proclaiming the good news that God through Christ destroyed the scorecard of human sin and urges everyone to accept and receive what he has already done for them.

This way of looking at relationships is very different from my old approach. I can now look at my fellow human beings not with the traditional "saved group/lost group" paradigm, but rather as people God already loves and for whom Christ has already died, risen and ascended. God is for humanity; he is pulling for us, and his presence and power is all around us! Evangelism is not a matter of us earning the right to be heard, but rather, of Jesus making his appeal through us.

### Jesus on display

Paul wants us to know that Jesus is personally present in every human interaction. In my experience, I have found three basic types of human interaction:

1. Meaningful discussions with substance,
2. Exchanges of simple business or pleasantries.
3. Conflicted dialogues often plagued with miscommunication and hurt feelings.

It is much easier to see Jesus at work in the first kind, but I am becoming more aware of his presence in all three. How is Jesus alive in me empowering me to respond in all three kinds of encounter with love, care and wisdom?

I find myself prayerfully asking the Lord, "What was that all about? Where were you in that? What were you working out?" This practice is making the presence and power of Jesus so much clearer, and I find myself joining him in his ministry in more specific ways.

My old approach toward evangelism is not necessarily evil or wrong, and I believe that God has worked with it and through it. But I do believe that it is incomplete, and that the sense of truly seeing who Jesus is and where he is at work is essential to a fuller understanding and practice of healthy youth evangelism.

Jesus has helped me value all relationships, and he has set me free to trust him to work and move in people's lives. I no longer need to spend energy leveraging my influence so that I can offer the gospel as some kind of sales pitch. I can now rejoice and participate in the reality that Jesus is alive, present and on the move! **co**

## Message

From page 17



into his microphone: "This is the LM [Lunar Module] pilot speaking. I'd like to take this opportunity to ask every person listening in to pause for a moment and contemplate the events of the past few hours, and to give thanks in his or her own way."

Aldrin's way of giving thanks was to gently pour the wine into the chalice. He then recited—silently, as NASA had requested—John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches.... Without me you can do nothing."

Taking Communion on the moon!

### Back to God

This remarkable story is relayed in Andrew Chai-kin's history, *A Man on the Moon: The Voyage of the Apollo Astronauts*. Back on earth, Aldrin's wife Joan marveled—Buzz had not forgotten the deeper significance of what was happening on July 20, 1969. On his return to earth, Aldrin reflected aloud on the meaning of Psalm 8:3-4, words written some 2,800 years earlier by another gazer into the starry night: "When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, what you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"

Ironically, humanity's most stunning technological feat took some of its key participants back—if only for a few moments—to their own humble place in the cosmos. As the apostle Paul told a group of advanced thinkers back in Athens, Greece, in the first century, God is not far from every one of us (Acts 17:27).

The world has all but forgotten Buzz Aldrin's call to thanksgiving and his Communion service, standing as they do in the shadow of Neil Armstrong's famous words, "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind." But that humble acknowledgment from space of our dependence on the Creator of all things and our union with Jesus Christ speaks to the quality of human life in ways that will forever transcend even our most amazing technological achievements. **co**

# Give me a break!

By Sue Berger

It's been a bad morning. One of those mornings where everything goes wrong. It started first crack out of the bag when I discovered my husband finished off the granola. He alternates between three different cereals, but I eat only the granola. Now I had no cereal for my breakfast. Grrrr... Did I mention I'm not a morning person?

I head out on my morning errands. I spy a decent parking spot and circle around to come in from the right direction. I politely pause for an idiot in a little bitty car, only to have that same idiot whip into my parking spot. Incredulous, I watch a bright-pink-sweater-clad gal jump out of her car and run into the store, completely oblivious to me sitting right there

**A nation reveals its true form in a crisis. The finery and fashion are stripped away. This is what the people are.**

with my blinker on. Now come on! A person can't possibly be that blind, so it's just plain rude! Ugh! Finally inside the store, I briskly walk the five acres of aisles to gather the four items I need. I can tell I'm not in a good mood. My face hurts and I realize my brow is so furrowed it's cramping. I tell myself to relax, drop my shoulders and take a deep breath. My purse strap falls off my shoulder, hits my forearm and I drop a pack of batteries and a box of granola. At least it wasn't something breakable. I'm trying to look on the bright side.

I pick a checkout line. It doesn't matter which one. They'll all be slow. I try the deep breath again. Without dropping my shoulder this time. Bored, I read the ridiculous headlines on the magazine rack. Then I catch a flash of pink behind me. Surely not! I steal a look. Yep, it's the parking spot thief. Unchristian thoughts start going through my mind. How can I slow this line down even more? Ask for a price check? Change my mind on what I'm purchasing? Try to use my library card instead of a credit card? Dump out

my purse and count out all the loose change rattling around in the bottom of it? I'd look like an idiot... but somehow it'd be worth it. I scold myself for the thoughts and tell myself to let it go. Besides, she's totally clueless that she's a thief.

Back home, I clean the receipts out of my wallet. One well-worn scrap of paper gets put back into my wallet. Why do I even bother? I look at the hand-written IOU, tempted once again to just throw it away. I really did trust my coworker to pay me back. We even laughed when he gave me the piece of paper as our "contract." But I have to assume it's long forgotten on his part. It's not a big deal, is it? Just a small breach of trust, isn't it? I really should just throw it away. But it hurts. I tuck it back in my wallet.

My computer screen flashes the headline news. Same old stuff. Corporate corruption, government spending, indictments, severe weather... God, my head hurts...

God. Where have you been today? I've been on the short end of the stick all morning. It's just not fair! I pull my weight. I work hard. I pay my taxes and my tithes. I try to be polite. I'm a good person! Why the injustice?

Frustrated, I click on my online daily devotional. Luke 6:35-37. "I tell you, love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return. You'll never—I promise—regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we're at our worst. Our Father is kind; you be kind. Don't pick on people, jump on their failures, criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment" (*The Message*).

I wonder. Have I ever eaten the last of God's granola? Stolen his parking spot? Owe him a debt? Duh! He's given me everything! Everything I don't deserve. And not given me what I do deserve! Where's the justice in that? It's not fair, thank God!

"God, I'm so sorry. Forgive me? Again? Thank you so much for your mercy. For your grace. For your love. I'm no different from those around me. Thank you for loving them too."

What a relief.

If you'll excuse me, I have a scrap of paper to throw away. Then I think I'll enjoy a bowl of granola out on the patio... ☺

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# Work Hard for the Lord

## A study of 2 Timothy 2

By Michael Morrison

**I**n this letter, Paul gives final exhortations to Timothy, encouraging him to be a faithful worker in the word of truth. The work will be difficult, but it will be worth it.

### Strengthened by grace (verses 1-7)

Paul exhorts Timothy: **You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.** “Strong in grace” could have several meanings: 1) to be confident in God’s grace toward humanity, 2) to emphasize grace in preaching, or 3) emboldened by God’s grace, to be confident in all of life.

Paul knows that he is going to die, and Timothy will die, too. So Paul wants him to train some replacements, to create an expanding network of teachers: **And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.** This is a good principle for ministry today.



If God’s church had a foundation stone, what would be inscribed on it? Paul says it would have a promise, and a warning.

Timothy will encounter problems, persecution, and sometimes even boredom. Timothy needs to be mentally prepared for the challenges. So Paul reminds him that he needs to be committed: **Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.** Timothy is not alone—he is enduring it “with us.” And he is not working for himself—he is working for Christ.

**No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer.** It’s OK to be *involved* in secular affairs—Paul sometimes worked as a tentmaker—but Timothy should not be *entangled* in the secular world, looking there for his sense of self-worth. He is primarily a servant of Jesus, and he should seek to please Jesus, even if he has a secular job.

Paul moves to another metaphor: **Similarly, if**

**anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules.** Paul hints at a “victor’s crown” for Timothy, when the work is done the way his commander wants it done.

A third metaphor: **The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops.** Paul again hints that Timothy will receive something in return.

Paul was not the first to use soldiers, athletes and farmers as examples of diligence—various Greek writers used the same three metaphors. Paul uses this trio to point out that gospel work involves toughness, focus, obedience and hard work. He concludes by inviting Timothy to see himself in these metaphors: **Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.**

### The gospel (verses 8-13)

Paul now moves to another topic, and a different style. He begins with a pithy saying: **Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel...** It’s about Jesus, summarized here by his resurrection and his role as Messiah in the line of David.

Paul sometimes gave more prominence to the crucifixion, but as he sat on death row, the resurrection might well grow in importance. And Jesus’ Davidic role may be what got Paul into the most legal trouble: he was proclaiming that Christ was king.

It is the gospel **for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal.** But ironically, **God’s word is not chained.** The work is still being done, because Paul gave the message to reliable workers who could teach many more.

**Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory.** Why should Timothy work hard and risk persecution? Earlier, Paul hinted at a reward. Here, he emphasizes the results it has for other people—he wants others to become aware of and grasp the salvation that is (already) in Christ. That is something he can feel good

about forever: the reward is intrinsic to the work.

Paul includes another summary of the message—this one has rhythm to make it easier to remember. **Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him (and we did), we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him** (another hint of reward).

And what happens with the opposite extreme? **If we disown him, he will also disown us. If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.** In the first three pairs, we are like Christ. In the fourth, Paul breaks the parallelism: If there is any failure in the process, it is because *we* have rejected our Savior. If we follow him, we will get what we want: eternal glory. If we reject him, we will also get what we want: he will let us leave. His desire for us continues; the question is, whether we will continue to desire him.

### Good work (verses 14-19)

In another change of style and topic, Paul begins to warn Timothy that some doctrinal discussions are a waste of time: **Keep reminding them of these things**—of the central truths of the gospel. **Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.** What words were people arguing about? We do not know.

In contrast to fruitless arguments, Paul advises Timothy to **do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.** Timothy needs to work with the gospel correctly, with no regrets when he presents himself to God.

The context, in the verse before and the verse after, is not people who refuse to work, but people who use the truth in a crooked way. They distort it, argue about irrelevant concepts, or go on and on without ever getting anywhere. So Paul advises, if you don't want to be embarrassed, then **avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.** Don't waste your time with pointless discussions.

If we give them "equal time," **their teaching will spread like gangrene.** And then Paul gives a specific example: **Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some.**

We are not sure how those two men got that idea. Maybe they took Paul's idea that we are raised with Christ, to conclude that we already have *all* that God has to offer. That idea would not be very attractive to an apostle on death row! They probably thought their idea was the most important teaching in the church, but Paul says it was a waste of time, and it had caused some people reject Christianity.

Even though some people lead others astray, **neverthe-**

**less, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."** The Greco-Roman world had many buildings with inscriptions.

If God's church had a foundation stone, what would be inscribed on it? Paul says it would have a promise, and a warning. God will be faithful to his people, and his people need to stay away from sin. If we want the results of righteousness, we need to do what is righteous. We need to be faithful to our commanding officer.

### A noble instrument (verses 20-26)

Paul turns from the building, to objects inside the building: **In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble.** Some are fine dinnerware; others are good for scraping mud off your boots. Some are ornate decorations, and others are chamber pots.

But what is Paul's point in this analogy? **If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.** There's a good way to live, and a bad way. If we want the results of righteousness, then we need to put wrong ways out of our lives. So Paul advises Timothy to **flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.** All of us who follow Christ should love these virtues.

And then Paul returns for a third blast against fruitless disagreements: **Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.** Some people may try to divert your attention toward *their* favorite topic of disputation, but don't take the bait.

**The Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.** Just teach the truth; don't get involved in personal attacks (which were common in the ancient world; there was intense competition for status and honor, often at the cost of insulting and tearing down possible competitors).

Paul explains how to deal with enemies: **Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.** They have a distorted view of reality, and they unwittingly serve the devil's purposes. But we do not condemn—we hope for the best, praying that God will eventually help them see the truth.

When personal resentment rises up within us, we need to respond not only with prayer for our opponent, but also prayer for ourselves, that we too might escape the trap of the devil. ☪

## Hmm...

Renewal often begins by testing the wind: discerning where God is already at work and becoming willing co-laborers with him (2 Cor. 6:1).

**Howard Snyder, *Signs of the Spirit***

Here's what often happens: Somebody comes along who has a fresh perspective on the Christian faith. People are inspired. A movement starts. Faith that was stale and dying is now alive. But then the pioneer of the movement—the painter—dies and the followers stop exploring. They mistakenly assume that their leader's words were the last ones on the subject, and they freeze their leader's words. They forget that as that innovator was doing his or her part to move things along, that person was merely taking part in the discussion that will go on forever. And so in their commitment to what so-and-so said and did, they end up freezing the faith.

**Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism***

Certainly, mankind without Christianity conjures up a dismal prospect. The record of mankind with Christianity is daunting enough, as we have seen. The dynamism it has unleashed has brought massacre and torture, intolerance and destructive pride on a huge scale, for there is a cruel and pitiless nature in man which is sometimes impervious to Christian restraints and encouragements. But without these restraints, bereft of these encouragements, how much more horrific the history of these last 2,000 years must have been! Christianity has not made man secure or happy or even dignified. But it supplies a hope. It is a civilizing agent. It helps to cage the beast. It offers glimpses of real freedom, intimations of a calm and reasonable existence.

Even as we see it, distorted by the ravages of humanity, it is not without beauty. In the last generation, with public Christianity in headlong retreat, we have caught our first, distant view of a de-Christianized world, and it is not encouraging.

**Paul Johnson, *A History of Christianity***

**God does not deal with sin by ridding our lives of it as if it were a germ, or mice in the attic. God does not deal with sin by amputation as if it were a gangrenous leg, leaving us crippled, holiness on a crutch. God deals with sin by forgiving us, and when he forgives us there is more of us, not less.**

**Eugene Petersen, *Tell it Slant***

*Ring the bells that still can ring,  
Forget your perfect offering,  
There's a crack in everything,  
That's how the light gets in.*

**Leonard Cohen, *Anthem***

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