

JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2018

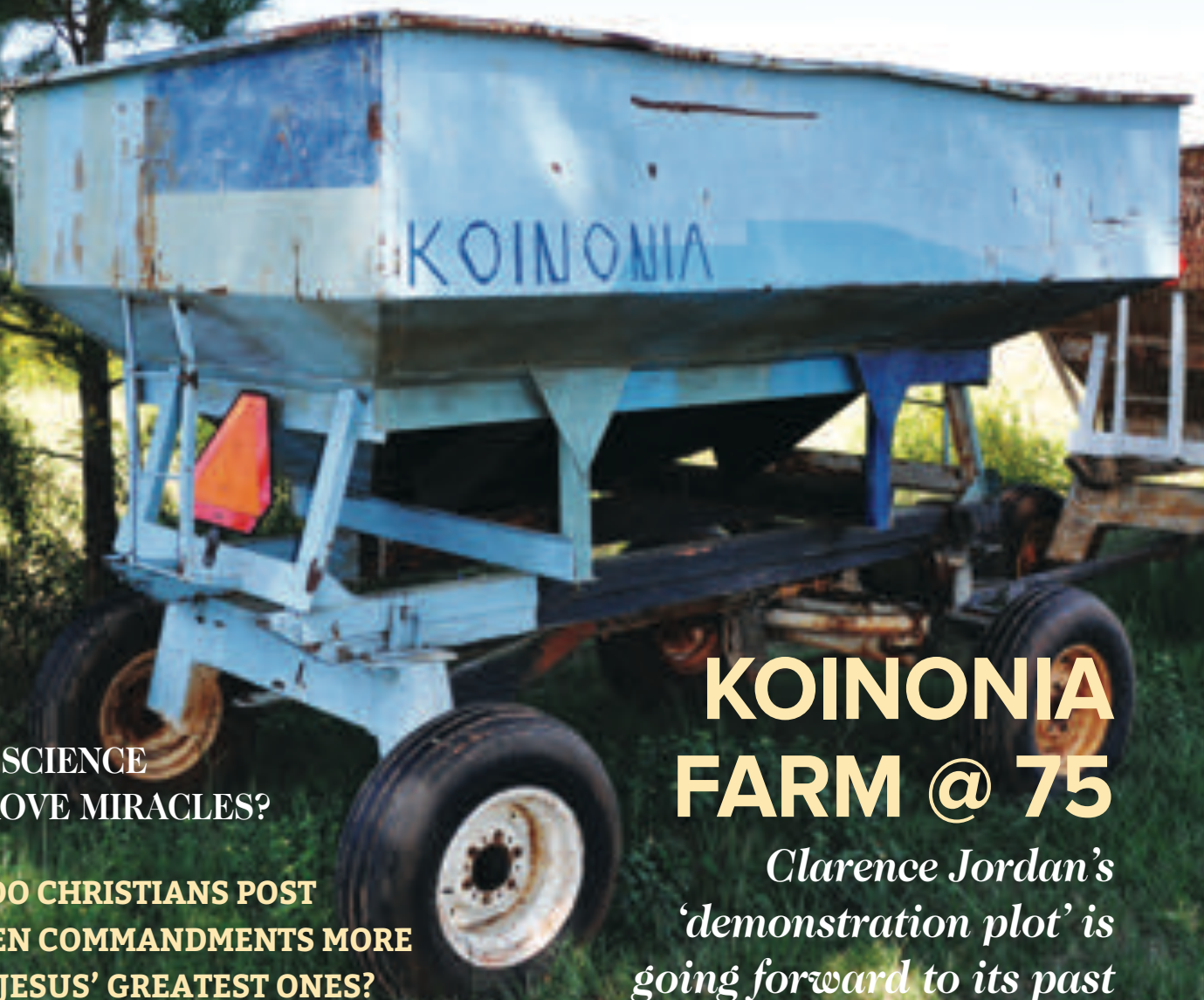
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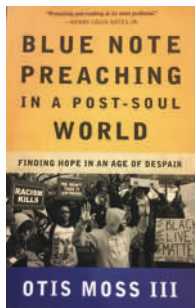
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MEDIA: BEAUTY IN THE ASHES

'Blue Note' preaching finds hope in despair

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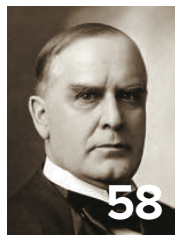
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Cover photo by John D. Pierce. Koinonia Farm near Americus, Ga., is celebrating 75 years of challenges and opportunities as a "demonstration plot" for the Kingdom of God.

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Worth Repeating

“Jesus died to take away our sins, not our minds.”

—Susan Sparks, comedian and pastor of Madison Ave. Baptist Church in New York City, on the young-earth perspective promoted by Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis (BNG)

“White supremacy is not just backward but devilish.”

—Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (*The Tennessean*)

“Let the political evangelicals have the term. Everyone else walk away. Call yourself something else. Perhaps Christian will come back in vogue.”

—Scot McKnight, professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary in Lombard, Ill., blogging at patheos.com

“There is no group in the United States less attached to its own ideals or more eager for its own exploitation than religious conservatives... There is more at stake here than bad politics. When Christians ally their faith with bias and exclusion, they are influencing how the public views Christianity itself.”

—Michael Gerson, former speechwriter for Pres. George W. Bush and conservative columnist for *The Washington Post*

MELISSA ROGERS TO RECEIVE 2018 JUDSON-RICE AWARD

Please mark Thursday, April 26, 2018, on your calendars to be in Winston-Salem, N.C., for Nurturing Faith’s annual Judson-Rice Award Dinner. The award, created in 2000 to recognize exceptional and trusted leadership, will be presented to attorney and religious liberty advocate Melissa Rogers. Register online at nurturingfaith.net, or call (478) 301-5655.



“[P]eople on the left and on the right who try to use politics to find their moral meaning are turning politics into an idol. Idolatry is what happens when people give ultimate allegiance to something that should be serving only an intermediate purpose...”

—Columnist David Brooks in *The New York Times*

“The painful truth is that political, commercial, and even religious leaders are comfortable bestowing platitudes on Dr. [Martin Luther] King’s life and ministry while actively and deliberately disregarding his warnings and call for repentance.”

—Judge Wendell L. Griffen, pastor of New Millennium Church in Little Rock, Ark., in his book *The Fierce Urgency of Prophetic Hope* (2017, Judson Press)

“Too often, we judge other groups by their worst examples while judging ourselves by our best intentions, forgetting the image of God we should see in each other.”

—Pres. George W. Bush, in an October address in New York City (CNN)

“There’s a certain satisfaction for those of us who came of age at the time of the Christian Right’s ascendancy to see such widespread acknowledgement of what many of us knew all along—that the so-called Christian Right was always a scam, a caustic combination of patriarchy and big money interests scamming the country behind an edifice of ‘family values’ and ‘morals.’”

—Writer Patricia Miller in *Religious Dispatches*

“We will not win the day with a clenched fist and closed ears toward the wide range of religious traditions calling out for a just and compassionate America.”

—President Katharine R. Henderson of Auburn Seminary in New York City (RNS)



We can't 'just move on' yet

By John D. Pierce

Writers take different routes to the finished product. My approach usually involves jotting down a thought or two on a scrap of paper or a napkin — with a later determination to discard, hold for further consideration or develop it for publication.

The roots of this editorial go back beyond the public debates over sporting events and the national anthem that arose last year. Yet the continuing struggle for racial justice just can't be ignored.

Some readers would rather we not bring up topics that are often divisive. But such avoidance is one of the reasons we seem to have learned so little in decade after decade of struggling to affirm the dignity and equality of all persons.

And let's face it: some of the strongest obstacles come from within American Christianity whether by intention or ignorance.

There is no greater disappointment than when facing the stark reality that often the strongest enablers of and excuse makers for racism or at least racial insensitivities are those who express a strong allegiance to Jesus Christ. This disconnection is frightful and staggering, and the associated lack of basic awareness and sensitivities is appalling.

It seems we learn so little from history. From the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement and beyond, racism has found religious cover from preachers and Christian-identified organizations with a bent toward discrimination in an effort to gain or hold societal control.

One only has to listen to learn,

however. As a child of the '60s I heard much about race from church people:

"If God had meant for races to mix he'd put them on the same continent," I was told. (There was no mention of African migration to America being involuntary or the earlier invasion of the continent by Europeans.)

"If our people had not come here the Indians wouldn't have known about Jesus," a Sunday school teacher explained. (What a nice approach to evangelism: stealing people's land and putting them on a death march so they can be saved.)

"They all steal; it's in their blood," one Independent Baptist told me of all African Americans.

The nearby "distinctively Christian" fundamentalist school taught the horrid "Curse of Ham" to justify white supremacy and a divine directive for blacks to live in servitude. (Never mind that the Genesis passage noted makes no such claims. In fact, it was not God but a drunken Noah who offered the curse and it was directed toward Canaan, not Ham, and had nothing to do with race. Picky, picky.)

Martin Luther King Jr. was not regarded as a fellow Baptist Christian and minister but a "communist agitator." (That approach — denying the cause by discrediting the peaceful protestor — may sound familiar.)

But sadly, examples of racial injustice and racist attitudes are not tucked away in personal memories and history books. If so, it might be easier to heed the popular urging of those within the racial majority to simply "move on."



White nationalism is back in vogue today. For others, attitudes and expressions of racism or racial insensitivities are more subtle.

Many, however, are quick to assume positions of judgment about how persons of other races should think and feel about experiences unique to them.

Racial diversity for some white-dominated groups means embracing likeminded male authoritarians of color who share their discriminatory attitudes toward women, immigrants and LGBT persons.

It is amazing how much racial insensitivity is unaware — driven by ignorance and fear more than hatred, but with the same tragic results.

Some of my white friends honestly think they aren't racist because they like Steve Harvey. But they denigrate every call for racial justice and justify every action that enhances white political and economic control.

Racial attitudes can change — and often do, thank God! — but they can also be concealed. One doesn't have to scratch the surface of much popular religious and political rhetoric very deeply to find race-induced fears.

Human dignity and equality based on an affirmation that all persons are created in the image of God, and the resulting social justice, are not some strange ideas being imposed on any given situation or time. They are the Bible's basic truths being imposed on all persons in all times who claim its divine source.

We can deflect or defend whatever is happening today.

Or we might ask how the children of the 2010s will remember how the church of today faced up to these truths. **NFJ**

Diggin' it — for real

BY TONY W. CARTLEDGE

Have you ever wished that, just once, you could participate in a real live archaeological dig in Israel?

Here's your chance!

Nurturing Faith Experiences, in partnership with Campbell University Divinity School, has arranged for a limited number of participants to join the Jezreel Expedition for two weeks next June.

Jezreel, about an hour and a half north of Jerusalem, sits on one of the foothills of Mount Gilboa, overlooking the beautiful and fertile Valley of Jezreel. It was a strategic military outpost of the kings of Israel, and associated with several biblical stories.

The Jezreel Expedition, which began in 2012, is affiliated with the American Schools of Oriental Research. It is a joint project of the Zinman Institute of Archaeology at the University of Haifa, Israel, and the University of Evansville (Indiana).

The dates for our trip are June 7-22. We will begin with a two-and-a-half-day mini-tour of Jerusalem and select sites nearby. We will spend two nights (Friday-Saturday) in Jerusalem as we adjust to the time change and visit important locations, then take in more of the country as we travel to Jezreel on Sunday.

Our group will join the dig from June 10-22, lodging and taking our meals at Kibbutz Yizre'el, a pleasant gated community of about 500 living in a traditional kibbutz.

Accommodations may vary, but all rooms include air conditioning, WiFi and a small refrigerator.

We will have breakfast during a break at the dig site, and take other meals in the community dining hall. The kibbutz has a small store where we can purchase snacks, drinks and supplies.



Participants must be willing and able to rise early and engage in strenuous activity that involves walking, climbing, kneeling, digging, lifting buckets of dirt and occasionally pushing a wheelbarrow. Team members should also be cooperative and flexible: we will be working side by side with an international team of archaeologists and students.

A typical day begins at 5 a.m. with a short van ride to the site, where we dig (with breaks) until 12 or 1 p.m., usually concluding the morning by washing pottery with our feet in the refreshing waters of the shady Jezreel Spring.

After lunch at the kibbutz (the heaviest meal of the day), we will have time for showers and a short siesta before gathering to “read and write” the pottery we have collected. Here we will assist experts who determine the style and approximate age of the pottery, sort the most useful pieces, and label them with identifying codes.

In the evenings we will enjoy field school lectures or free time. On Saturday and some afternoons we will visit other sites in the area, such as Caesarea Maritima, Megiddo, Nazareth or Beth Shan.

No previous dig experience is required — just a willingness to learn and a cooperative spirit. We train on the job with proper dig techniques, and everyone contributes. Interested persons may contact me at cartledge@nurturingfaith.org to check on availability and learn more about the full itinerary, specific requirements and travel plans.

Few things are more exciting than uncovering a sherd of decorated pottery or other artifact that hasn't seen the light of day in thousands of years, and to learn what that tells us about the history of the site.

The cost of the trip is \$3990. That includes roundtrip airfare, ground transportation, lodging, and all but a very few meals. Since space is limited, participants are encouraged to apply early. Payment begins with a \$100 registration fee (refundable by March 1), a payment of \$1500 by March 1, and the balance paid by May 1.

Online registration through Campbell University Divinity School will be available soon. In the meantime, please contact me directly at cartledge@nurturingfaith.net to reserve your spot and receive further information.

To learn more about the dig in Jezreel, the lodgings at Kibbutz Yizre'el, and other opportunities associated with the trip, take a look at my blogs (www.nurturingfaith.net/tonys-blog) describing the experience Susan and I had this past June.

You can begin with “Getting oriented” and work your way forward through the next few blogs (“Tools of the trade,” “Pottery tells the tale,” “Life on the kibbutz,” and “What did you find?”) to get a good picture of what to expect.

It's not often we have an opportunity for such an “up close and personal” encounter with the land we call holy — a terrific experience for you, or one that could make an amazing gift for a pastor or other beloved minister who has longed for a deeper understanding of the Holy Land.

Dig in! **NFJ**

Beauty in the ashes

‘Blue Note’ preaching finds hope in despair

A reievew by John D. Pierce

“Is it not strange and a peculiar irony that America places a monument in Washington, D.C., to a small Southern preacher who pastored a church in Montgomery, Ala., that could not seat more than 250 people?” asks Otis Moss III, pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, in his book, *Blue Note Preaching in a Post-Soul World* (WJK, 2015).

Moss adds that the stone etched in the form of Martin Luther King Jr., with whom Moss’ father served in the heat of civil rights, “stands watch over Thomas Jefferson, George Washington and Abraham Lincoln to ensure the nation lives up to its creed.”

“That is the power of Blue Note preaching,” writes Moss.

Blue Note preaching, in the Black church tradition, has connections to the biblical laments of the Psalmist, prophets and others, said Moss. “The preaching

I heard seemed to know Amos personally, conversed with Isaiah weekly, and painted a picture of Jesus with such power that the aroma of wine at the wedding of Cana would saturate the air.”

Blue Note preaching refuses “to turn away from the beauty in the ashes,” writes Moss. Hence the book’s subtitle: “Finding Hope in an Age of Despair.”

Influenced by the work of playwright August Wilson, Moss — who gave the 2014 Lyman Beecher Lectureship on Preaching at Yale Divinity School on which this book is based — offers a new definition of preaching: “Blue Note preaching, or preaching with Blues sensibilities, is prophetic preaching — preaching about tragedy, but refusing to fall into despair.”

“Blues Speech,” he says, “rescues us from acceptance and dares us to move from the couch of apathy to the position of work.”

Moss’ approach to preaching is in stark

contrast to the escapism of pie-in-the sky or heretical “prosperity gospel” sermons. It faces up to the realities of pain and struggle but refuses to stay in a place of hopelessness. This is the challenge of preaching, said Moss.

“The call of the preacher is to stare in the darkness and speak the Blues with authority and witness the work of God in darkness and even in abyss.”

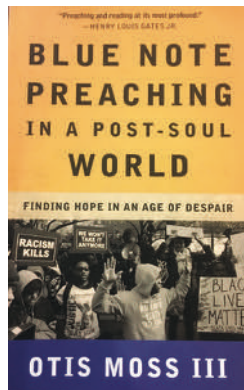
Moss reminds readers and listeners of the intended focus of such proclamation.

“Jesus is central to Blue Note preaching,” he writes. “... Jesus knows all about our troubles.”

“The preached Word,” he adds, “... has the audacity to reclaim Jesus as Savior and liberator of marginalized people.”

Moss’ important challenge to those called to the pulpit ministry is to neither avoid the darkness nor be consumed by it.

“It is the job of every preacher to teach the congregation to dance in the dark,” he writes, but then warns: “Do not let the darkness find its way in you, but dance in the dark.” **NFJ**



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World's best-prepared Sunday school teacher

Atkins writes, illustrates studies taught in his museum-like classroom

**STORY AND PHOTOS
BY JOHN D. PIERCE**

ORLANDO, Fla. — Wise writers avoid superlatives such as oldest or largest, because some reader usually provides evidence to the contrary. But I feel safe deeming R.L. (Dick) Atkins as the most prepared Sunday school teacher in the world.

If anyone has put more time and talent into the preparation and teaching of laypersons in congregational life, I'd like to

meet that person — and see the classroom. Dick writes and illustrates in-depth studies taught in a museum-like setting.

SURROUNDINGS

The typical block-walled space where Dick teaches each Sunday morning (and evening classes) is filled from floor to ceiling with charts and illustrations all of his own creation — plus a full-scale replica of the Ark of the Covenant.

Wrapped 30 feet around the ceiling is *The Atkins Timeline of Religious History*,

detailed and meticulously drawn in 1977. It allows Dick to orient participants to the time period being discussed with just the pointing of his finger.

The illustrated timeline includes dating advanced by those who hold to a young-earth belief of a few thousand years ago despite scientific evidence to the contrary. Yet it also shows Dick's belief in theistic evolution — one of the topics he teaches.

In addition to his *Theistic Evolution for the Layman*, Dick has researched and written several other volumes includ-

ing *Our Roots: The Early History of the Baptists and Anabaptists*, *The Genesis Anthology* and *The Key to the Proverbs*.

“Everything that’s taught here is written by me,” said Atkins. And the various volumes create a very tall stack.

Also among his original teaching resources are *Deities, Demigods and Demons of the Ancient Near East* and his *Practical Greek for the Layman*.

“From a college student to people my age,” was the response from the spry, 83-year-old retired engineer to my inquiry of who attends his classes at The Church on the Drive, formerly College Park Baptist Church, in Orlando, where Dick has taught for decades.

FORMATION

Dick grew up in the Everglades where he was high school valedictorian. He then served as state president of the Baptist Student Union while attending the University of Florida from which he received a degree in aeronautical engineering.

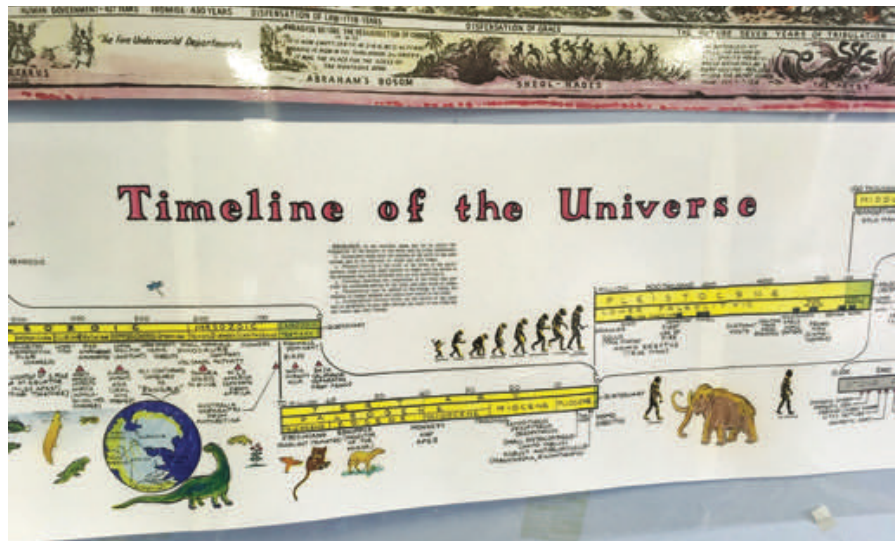
After graduate school at Southern Methodist University in Texas, he returned to Florida to work as a project engineer at the Naval Training Systems Center in Orlando.

His embrace of theistic evolution, he said, made finding a congregational home a bit challenging at times. Yet his strong belief in Baptist principles would not allow him to search far beyond his denominational heritage.

Dick said his first engagement in a local Southern Baptist church worked out well for a while. He had been upfront with his pastor and church about his deeply-held beliefs, while accepting that not all church members would need to have agreement around such nonessential matters.

As part of his testimony to fellow deacons in 1975, Dick shared that “Although I am an engineer by profession, I have always been a philosopher at heart. I look for truth and reason and purity in the institutions of man. So, I came to the Church as both a sinner and a seeker for truth.”

He added that his search for truth had led him to “believe in an overall plan for progress of God’s universe towards Truth,” adding: “To me, God is truth.”



MOVING ON

A couple of years later a guest speaker at the church, charged with giving a mission address, instead preached against belief in evolution — deeming it a threat to faith.

Dick felt a need to respond but assumed the older man who gave the address would not be open to alternative perspectives on the biblical truth. Instead, Dick wrote a nine-point “Brief for Evolution” that included scientific evidence along with an affirmation that “Any student who has completed a course in high school biology without discovering the truth of evolution was sleeping in class.”

He also warned that the church risked losing bright young people to the faith if they must choose between scientific and so-called biblical truth. One member of his Sunday school class had confided in Dick that this was the reality for his son.

Dick made his rebuttal available to those who attended his Sunday school class on Christmas morning that year, not expecting the issue to go further. However, early in the new year, 1978, Dick was called to a meeting with the deacon chairman and pastor who asked that he stop distributing materials and teaching.

Dick’s response that the Baptist concept of the priesthood of all believers should allow for diverse perspectives fell on deaf ears. A secretive church council meeting followed, he said, and then a Sunday night sermon opposing evolution.

“It was a very uncomfortable experi-

ence and a cowardly action on the part of the pastor, since I had no opportunity of rebuttal,” he said. “All of his arguments were feeble and easily answerable.”

NEW BEGINNING

Then, in September, the church adopted new guidelines for deacon selection that included a required affirmation of biblical inerrancy. Excluded from service, Dick waited until his various leadership roles in the church could be filled, then walked away.

Dick said his exclusion has great historic precedence including his own great-grandfather, a missionary to the Cherokees, who was “disfellowshipped by his pious Baptist brothers for the crime of taking communion with Methodists.”

Dick sought the help of local Baptist leaders to find a place where he could believe and teach his beliefs and serve as a faithful deacon, teacher and choir member. He appreciated the honesty of the most prominent Baptist pastor in town telling him he would not fit in the large, conservative congregation.

Finally, Dick and his family found a home at what was then called College Park Baptist Church late in 1978.

DISCOVERY

While Dick delves deeply as a researcher, writer and teacher into the roots of Baptists historically, he also shares openly his own faith journey — noting that it is his “esteem for equal rights and human dignity” that



determined his denominational affiliation.

So it comes as no surprise that he readily leaves Baptist groups that he feels depart from their historic commitments to liberty.

“I defy any overlord’s authority and any trammels on my conscience or threats to my standing as a priest, an autonomous believer, and soul responsible only to God,” he writes in a closing testimonial chapter in *Our Roots: The Early History of the Baptists and Anabaptists*.

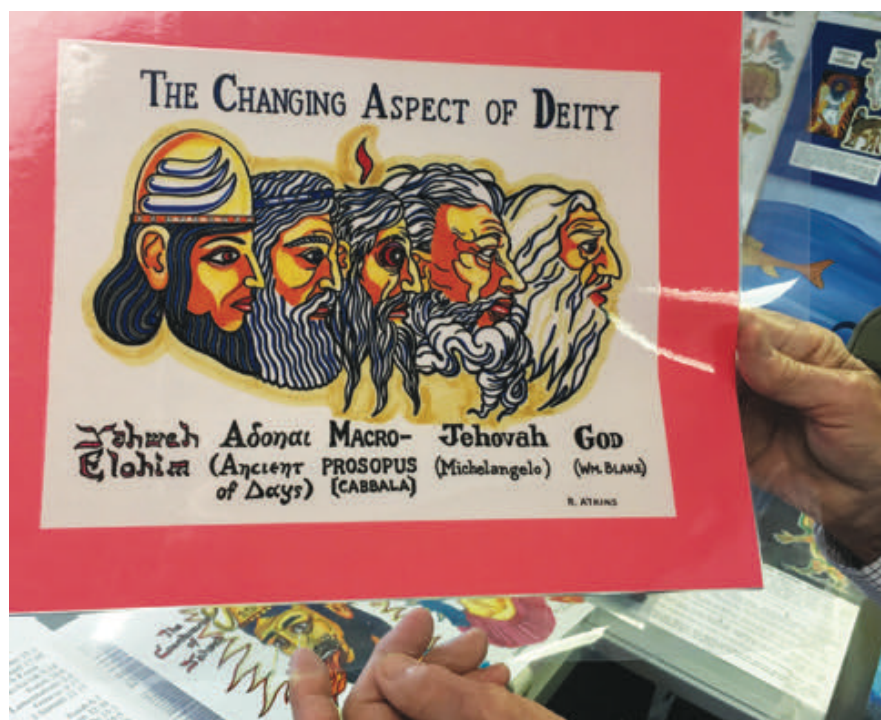
Dick also gets personal in sections of *Theistic Evolution for the Layman* that he teaches to fellow church members. He shares his pilgrimage of independent thinking from a children’s book on cavemen to Greek mythology to Darwin’s *Origin of the Species* that caused him to re-examine his biblical interpretations in new light.

Introducing his case for theistic evolution, he notes: “Every farmer who breeds animals and develops new varieties of plants should easily grasp the fact that the Creator can also do this on a grander scale.”

Dick has wide and varied interests, and pursues each with diligence and discovery. He is kind in his relationships yet straightforward in his analyses.

He can be critical of Catholics and Muslims (and Baptists who don’t live up to their roots) while being a strong supporter of the United Nations and human rights. He dedicated his book *One God, One World*, to the memory of Albert Schweitzer.

Dick appeals to scripture (“From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth...” Acts 17:26a), and affirms scientifically a continental drift to support his views on the unity of humanity.



SEEING AND LEARNING — Dick Atkins believes illustrations aid teaching to the point that he built a full-scale model of the Ark of the Covenant (above, left) and uses his artistic skills to draw timelines, charts and detailed images — such as this one showing the progression in the visualization of God — in a vibrant style.

TRUTH SEARCH

Encompassing all he does is his persistent search for truth — wherever it can be found. That guiding principle is on display in his classroom with the framed and illustrated words of Ralph Waldo Emerson: “Prefer truth above past apprehension of truth.”

And Dick knows of no more appropriate place for seeking truth than in the understanding of God, scripture and all else that flows from God.

“Theology is the science of religion,” said Atkins, a retired engineer who applied science to aeronautics. “I’m trying to get to the bottom of what we believe.”

Atkins digs deeply into the religious history that preceded Christianity — studying the works of the Jewish historian Josephus and others.

“No religion is made in a vacuum,” he said. “Our religion comes out of Judaism.”

In a highly descriptive style, he illustrates apocalyptic imagery found in Hebrew scripture and in New Testament writings.

“I use a lot of charts and pictures,” said Atkins, whose works resemble sci-fi illustrations.

Long ago when Florida Southern College started offering Greek language classes on weekends in Orlando, Dick dove right in for two years — allowing him to study the original texts of the New Testament.

He was not selfish with his knowledge, however. “I’ve taught Greek classes three times in this church,” he said. “I love to teach, and I want to provide teachers with tools.”

Indeed he does. One peek into his classroom or one conversation reveals an energy and commitment that have not faded over the decades.

And he’s grateful for a congregational family that appreciates and affirms his gifts — and gives him the freedom to exercise them.

“I’m privileged to have a church that lets me teach here.”

By the way, before you tell your class about the traveling Magi and their camels this Epiphany — you might check out Dick’s illustration of Persian priests on white horses. But as one friend said, “I’m not sure about that; we’d have to change a lot of Nativity scenes.” **NFJ**

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Epiphany: Big Questions

Jan. 7

Ephesians 3:1-12
The Mystery of the Ages

Jan. 14

1 Corinthians 6:12-20
What Is Best for Me?

Jan. 21

1 Corinthians 7:25-40
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1 Corinthians 8:1-13
Are You Going to Eat That?

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A Global Promise

Feb. 25

Genesis 17:1-16
A Covenant Family

March 4

Exodus 20:1-17
A Covenant Nation

March 11

Numbers 21:4-9
Covenant Breaking

March 18

Psalm 51
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Psalm 40:1-10
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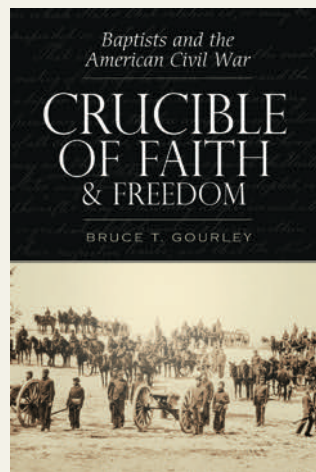
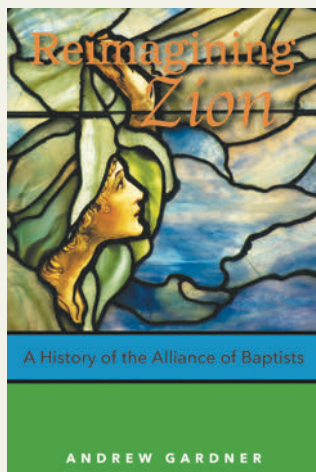
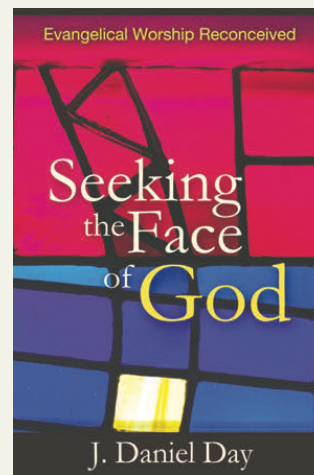
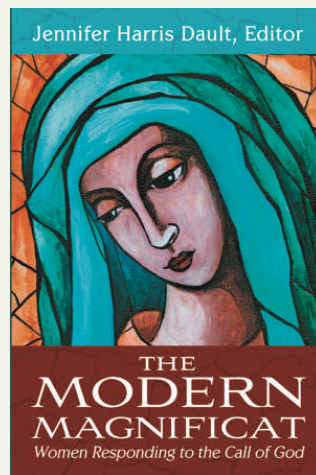
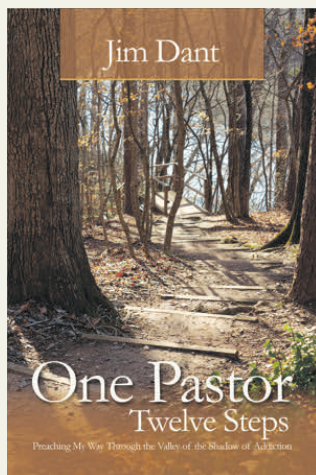
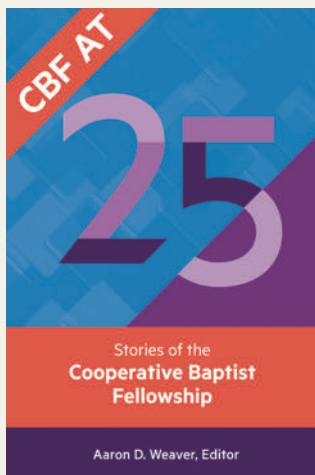
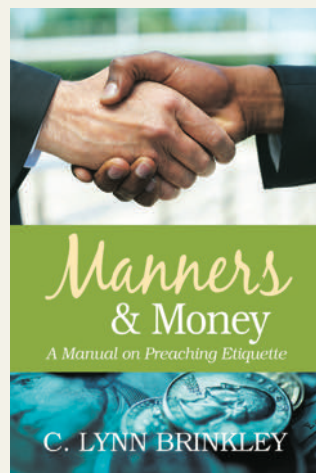
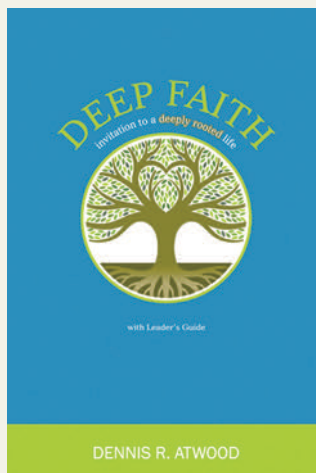
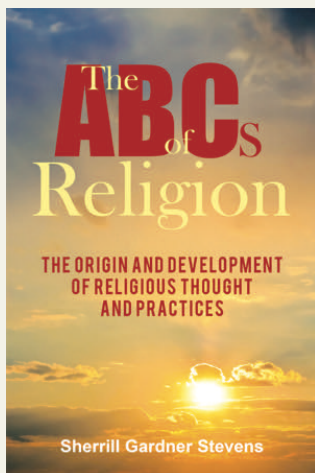
Hebrews 10:1-10
Coming to Sanctify

Christmas

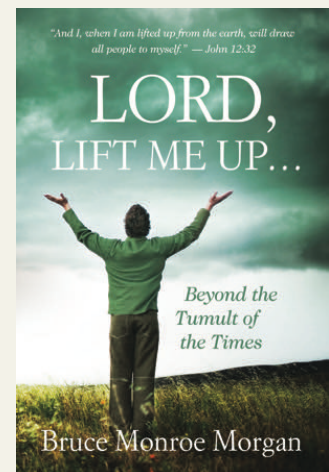
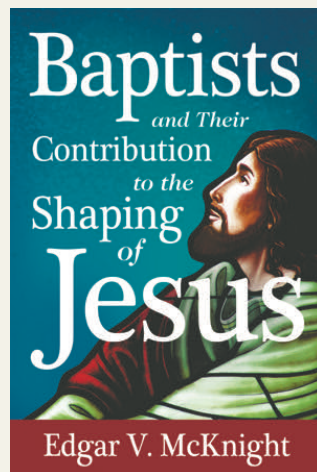
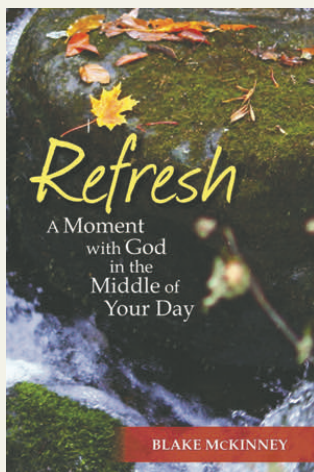
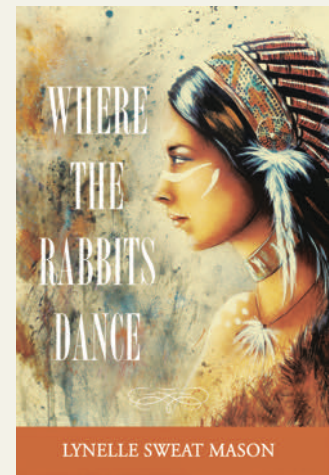
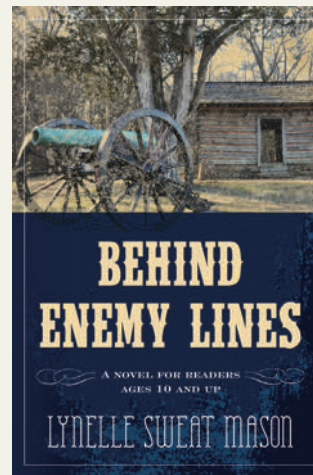
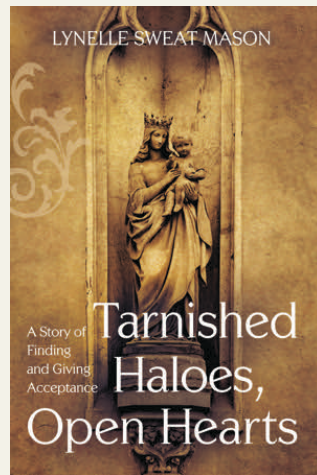
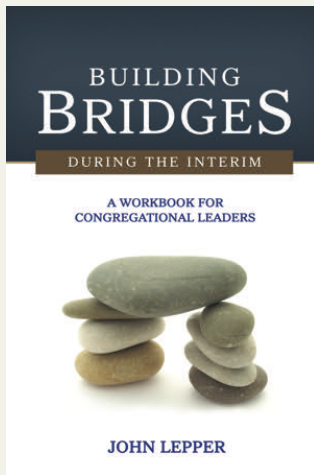
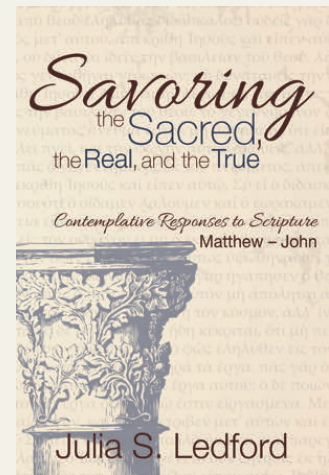
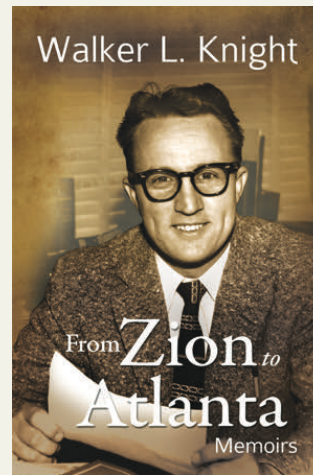
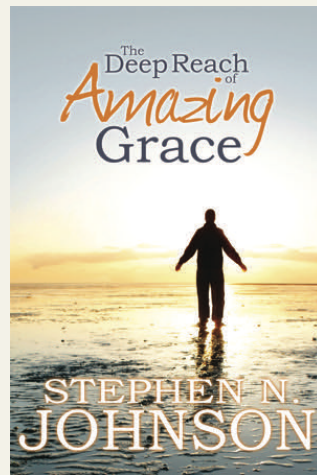
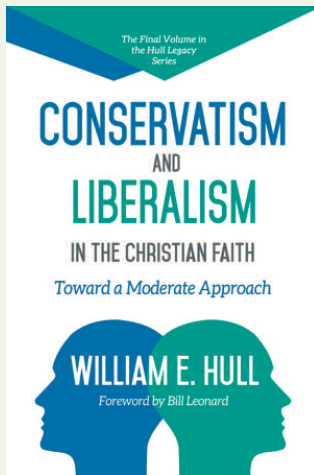
December 30

Colossians 3:12-17
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(Above) The Koinonia community begins each workday in this chapel, but participants are engaged in local congregations for worship and service as well.

KOINONIA FARM @ 75

Clarence Jordan's 'demonstration plot' for God's kingdom is going forward to its past

**STORY AND PHOTOS
BY JOHN D. PIERCE**

A MERICUS, Ga. — For 75 years the fields and groves of Koinonia Farm have produced pecans, peace and people of passion as a Christian community committed to simple, shared living, nonviolence and justice.

Clarence and Florence Jordan and Martin and Mable England acquired the land in Sumter County, Ga., on the outskirts of Americus and near the then-little-known farming community of Plains in 1942 — with a desire to test the model of the early church in modern times.

Their commitments to nonviolence and nondiscrimination would bring rejection and hostilities from the well-churched communities surrounding what Clarence envisioned — and described in farming parlance — as “a demonstration plot for the kingdom of God.”

ROOTS

Clarence was well equipped for both the physical and spiritual challenges ahead — with an agriculture degree from the University of Georgia, a doctorate in New Testament Greek from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a strong calling



Clarence
Jordan

(shared by others) to more fully live out the gospel that so many Southern whites claimed but had perverted.

Koinonia was founded on simple principles that arose from an honest reading of the life and teachings of Jesus and the mission of the early church: the idea that Christians should work for justice and treat all persons as being equally valued as children of God.

However, the Jordans and the Englands, who had served as missionaries in Burma, and others who brought Koinonia to life discovered that the mere notion of racial equality and interaction was not well received in rural southwest Georgia.

The word that stirred the most hostility in that racist, church-heavy culture was “integration.” However, Clarence, a thoughtful wordsmith, spoke differently of human equality.

Both heaven and hell are integrated, he would say. Instead he affirmed with Peter





in Acts 10:34 that, as the familiar King James Version put it, “God is no respecter of persons.” Later English translations made the point more clearly, that God shows no partiality or favoritism.

RECEPTION

As Jesus found out, along with many martyrs who followed, those who live at a higher societal standard are as threatening as those who live below expected behavior. And in both cases such threatening behavior brings harsh responses.

Local reaction to the suspicious, counter-cultural Christian community was explosive. In the late 1950s, especially, there were bullets, bombs and boycotts.

Local businesses refused to buy products from or sell needed products to Koinonia. So the community turned to mail order commerce, which had federal protection.

Pecans, peanuts and other goods were sold and shipped widely — gaining the slogan, “Help us ship the nuts out of Georgia.”

For some seekers, dissatisfied with a culture of greed and exclusion, Koinonia became a place of acceptance, peace and redirection.

Millard and Linda Fuller were among them. Their founding of both Habitat for Humanity International and the Fuller Center for Housing grew out of their spiritual experiences at Koinonia where they learned partnership home-building.

COTTON PATCH

Perhaps Clarence is best known for his translation of portions of the New Testament from the original Greek into the local Southern vernacular — made more famous in the *Cotton Patch Gospel* musical written by Tom Key and Russell Treyz, with music and lyrics by Harry Chapin.

The bluegrass-driven stage show that premiered in the early '80s, based on Clarence's *Cotton Patch Version of Matthew and John*, is set in Georgia. For some, both the Bible translations and the musical bring the challenges of Jesus too close — rather than keeping them at the more comfortable distance of Palestine two millennia away.

A simple field-side shed at Koinonia,



Bren Dubay

where Clarence did his writing, has been restored recently. He was working on a sermon there when he died of a heart attack on Oct. 29, 1969, at age 57.

He and Millard Fuller, who died in 2009, are buried in the beloved soil of Koinonia Farm on Picnic Hill.

TRANSITIONS

Over the past three quarters of a century Koinonia has gone through many changes — and nearly faced extinction. For a time the community was organized as a non-profit business.

The original 245 acres expanded to approximately 1,400 at one point. However, burdensome debt led to the selling of nearly half the land in 2005 along with what current executive director Bren Dubay calls a refocus on “going forward to our past.”



HOSPITALITY - Koinonia welcomes guests for brief visits or longer-term retreats and engagement in simple, Christian community.

“Koinonia is still here,” said Bren, a native Texan who assumed her leadership role in the community in 2004. “We’ve recommitted ourselves to that original vision.”

Before agreeing to join the community, Bren said she asked for two things: “that we pray together and that we do our math.” The prayerful discernment and embrace of financial realities led to a scaled-down farm operation.

The Koinonia community — now five covenanted and four novice members — carry out the labor-intensive farm work and product sales along with interns (ranging in age from 20 to 91 now) and a few seasonal and full-time employees.

COMMUNITY

Work is just one aspect of community life where an emphasis is placed on feeding both spiritual and physical hunger. Early commitments to peace and justice that led to the founding of Koinonia remain strong today.

“The Englands and the Jordans were what we’d probably term as activists today,” said Bren. “They were working for causes.”

Those causes have New Testament roots, she said: “What you’re doing for others should come out of souls rooted in the Gospels, especially [Jesus’] Sermon on the Mount.”

The founding partners saw “service” differently than many do today, she added.

“Koinonia was all about being a neighbor and living in relationship with others,” she said. “They believed in the sisterhood and brotherhood of all persons.”





Bakery coordinator Geneva Brown and Norris Harris, a pastor and chaplain, spread the chocolate and pecans to be cooled, packaged and shipped. Koinonia products are available at koinoniafarm.org. (below) Neighbor Peggy Russell and intern John Maclutsky assemble popular pecan-stuffed dates.



Bren described the farm, now designated as a state historical site, as “a very humble place” where the emphasis is on “living the life” as viewed through shared commitments to Christ and community.

Such internal expressions of faith are not as tangible as building houses, for example, she noted, but are just as important. So is the blessed land on which the community continues to live.

“Three things anchor us to the land,” said Bren, noting that the first is a commitment to “farm in healthy ways.” Koinonia partners seek to manage a balanced ecosystem and strive to nourish both the earth and those who get their food from it.

Second, and unchanging through the many years, hospitality is served in large portions at Koinonia. “We are a place of welcome to people who come from all around the world.”

Neighbors are invited to share meals, and guest rooms are offered to those seeking a place of refuge from the busyness and distractions of most contemporary living.

The third anchor is the internship program that bears fruit of its own. Intern sessions, focused on discipleship, are offered each year to give individuals or families the chance to be immersed in an experiment of Christian communal living.

While some may sense a call to a long-term relationship with Koinonia, most take what they experienced and use it elsewhere.

“There are things you can learn at Koinonia and take wherever you live,” said Bren.

ACCEPTANCE

“We try not to be program driven,” said Bren, who uses the end of the noontime meal to welcome guests and focus the attention of the community on their purpose and the needs before them. Nevertheless, the community is engaged in ministries outside the farm such as assisting immigrants, prisoners and deportees.

Also, they participate in the Palestinian/Israeli peace movement and offer a summer peace camp for those 11-14 years of age.

The community begins each day in the simple chapel across the highway from the other buildings. However, the members — who are Baptist, Quaker, African Methodist Episcopal, Catholic and from other Christian traditions — are engaged in various local churches — some being congregations that once resisted or rejected the Christian community.

“We want to be good citizens of the larger community,” said Bren.

The First Baptist Church and First United Methodist Churches of Americus will host the Clarence Jordan Symposium and a celebration of Koinonia Farm’s 75th birthday March 8-11, 2018.

A musical presentation of *Cotton Patch Gospel* by the Sumter Players will be held on Friday night at Americus’ historic Rylander

Theater. Visit koinoniafarm.org for symposium details.

The Chamber of Commerce in the town that once boycotted Koinonia has now presented the farm with its agriculture award. And a plaque honoring Clarence Jordan has been placed in front of the theater where the musical adaptation of his gospel rendering will be performed.

LOOKING AHEAD

Bren said the community has to be careful stewards of the land and the aging buildings at Koinonia, realizing “we live on a shoestring.” But living in Christian community, she noted, requires more than solid business practices and traditional models of success.

The two deadliest threats to community, she noted, are “gossip and endless meetings.” So she tries to keep both to a minimum.

When conflict arises, they turn to Matthew 18 which calls for taking the concern directly to the person with whom one has conflict, and if unresolved to a few others and then the larger community if needed.

Team leaders — such as the one designated for growing and harvesting pecans — are expected to obtain input from others but ultimately make the decisions related to that responsibility. “Then everybody tries to make that decision work,” she added.

Human communities are never perfect, said Bren, and acknowledging such is a helpful way to approach such relationships.

“Yet there is something that works through the people and the land,” she said, “no matter how imperfect either may be.”

BEING, DOING

The stigma that once brought misunderstanding — as well as the hostilities toward Koinonia based on clear understandings of its purpose — have subsided over the many decades in which the community was at times deemed communist or worse. But there is still occasional confusion.

Bren recalled the odd look on the faces of a couple who cautiously entered the Koinonia welcome center where various products are sold and information is provided. The

Clarence and Martin

In 2012, Kirk Lyman-Barner of the Fuller Center for Housing in Americus, Ga., called to say that Clarence Jordan’s son Lenny had told him of a once-only meeting between his father and Martin Luther King Jr.

The meeting, Kirk learned, was arranged by Vincent Harding, a King biographer and Mennonite activist in the Civil Rights Movement. The account of that meeting between two men seeking racial justice in a time of social upheaval had never been published.

Gratefully, I accepted Kirk’s invitation to join him and a videographer to interview Harding — then 81 and doing research and teaching at Atlanta’s Morehouse College. That story appeared in the May 2012 issue of *Baptists Today* and in *Roots in the Cotton Patch: Volume One*, edited by Kirk Lyman-Barner and Cori Lyman-Barner.

While both King and Jordan worked for racial equality and justice, their approaches were different, Harding said. King used boycotts effectively to cripple unjust economic systems and to raise public awareness of these injustices.

Jordan, on the other hand, was the recipient of boycotts exercised by local businesses against Koinonia Farm. At Jordan’s request, Harding brought his friends Clarence and Martin together in Albany, Ga., in 1961 to discuss their different perspectives.

The exchange, said Harding, revealed “loving respect” and “clear disagreement.”

The meeting, according to Harding, occurred in the home of Albany physician and civil rights activist Dr. W.G. Anderson.

Clarence was joined by Koinonia partner Con Browne.

Both King and Jordan were “full of grace” toward each other, Harding recalled, but Clarence got quickly to his concern about boycotts. While neither bought the other’s case, both King and Jordan “had developed a really impressive capacity to listen,” said Harding.

He noted their different approaches to the same goals: Jordan carried out his mission more quietly, as a writer and teacher living in a rural Christian community, while King operated in the public eye and through the beneficial attention of available media.

The two, said Harding, were “operating on absolutely different scales.” Yet they shared in common a faith in Christ, a love of people and a warm sense of humor.

Harding said he found it fascinating that both Jordan and King were Georgians and Baptists — with roots in their native South where storytelling is common. Yet this little-known meeting of two very influential men of that time had not drawn much attention over the years.

Harding, who died in 2014, had close relationships with both King and Jordan, and shared their passion for bringing to life Christian understandings of peace and justice. In addition to other writings, he drafted King’s famous speech in opposition to the Vietnam War that was delivered at Riverside Church in New York City in 1967.

Bringing King and Jordan together in Albany, Ga., in 1961 was just one of many good bridges Harding built in his lifetime of service. **NFJ**

books and crafts, freshly-ground peanut butter, baked goods, delectable chocolate candies and new-crop pecans were not all they thought might be present.

They’d stopped at a convenience store for directions and were told: “Don’t go there; it’s a nudist colony.”

With a laugh, Bren said that was not a part of the original vision nor is it the current expression of Koinonia that is now “going forward to our past.”

While much has changed over 75 years the basic though radical commitments to

the Christian concepts of love, grace, peace and justice remain strong — rooted in the gospel idea that the life of faith is about growing on the inside moreso than what can be grown in the fields.

So as members of the current community seek to “put life back in the soil,” said Bren, they do so with an awareness and appreciation for what began on this southwest Georgia farmland long ago.

“Clarence believed you had to be something before you could do something.” **NFJ**

Epiphany—past and present

By John R. Franke

The word “Epiphany” comes from Greek and in that context means “manifestation.” The Christian season of Epiphany celebrates the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ to the world during the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus.

This manifestation is both the culmination of the unfolding mystery foretold by the prophets of Israel and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God proclaimed in the Gospels.

Many Protestant churches observe the season of Epiphany from Jan. 6 until the beginning of Lent on Ash Wednesday. During this time it is traditional to give thanks for the revelation of God in Jesus Christ so many years ago and to celebrate his work of proclaiming and teaching the Kingdom of God, a world where everyone has enough and no one needs to be afraid.

On the cross, Jesus declared that his reconciling work on earth was finished. Strikingly, he had prepared his followers for his departure by telling them that those who believed in him would not only do the works he did, but also that they would do even greater things (John 14:12).

Later in John’s Gospel, after the resurrection, Jesus commissioned his followers with these words from John 20:21: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Think about these words for a moment in conjunction with Epiphany. Jesus was passing on to his disciples the task of continuing to manifest the Kingdom of God in the world. After giving this commission to his disciples, Jesus breathed on them and said “Receive the Holy Spirit” to empower them for the work he had given

them to do.

This means that the followers of Jesus are entrusted with the task of continuing Epiphany, of making the vision of the Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus ever more manifest in the midst of the world.

While it is certainly true that God is at work outside of the church, the New Testament characterization of the church (the gathered followers of Jesus) as the Body of Christ leads to the conclusion that it is intended to be a focal point of the mission of God in the world. As the Body of Christ, the church is sent into the world and called to continue the mission of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, to make the Kingdom of God ever more manifest in the world.

From this perspective the mission of the church should be shaped by the life, mission and ministry of Jesus recorded in the Gospels.

In the inaugural events of his public ministry found in Luke 4, Jesus cited the words of the prophet Isaiah as a summary of the liberating work he had been sent to accomplish: to bring good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed. This emphasis on the liberating ministry of Jesus points to an understanding of the church as the community of Christ’s followers who join with Jesus in his struggle to free humans created in God’s image from the forces of oppression and enslavement.

The mission of the church, in keeping with the mission of Jesus, is to proclaim and

live out the meaning of God’s liberating and redemptive work. This is closely connected with the proclamation of the Kingdom of God.

In the aftermath of his encounter with Zacchaeus, Jesus provided another summary of his mission, saying that he had come to seek out and save the lost (Luke 19:10). In response to Jesus, Zacchaeus promised to give half his possessions to the poor and pay back four times as much to anyone he had defrauded (v. 8).

Here we see repentance, reformation and restoration — the kind of individual transformation that has a direct effect on the social order. In the Gospels we see that evangelism and social justice are inseparable elements of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God and the good news that in Jesus Christ, God is reconciling all things.

Faithfulness to the way of Jesus means doing the things Jesus taught us to do. It is perhaps one of the great tragedies in the history of the church that the gospel has often been turned into simply a question of right belief rather than a way of life.

During this season of Epiphany, let us give thanks for the coming of Jesus and also remember our responsibility to continue his work of manifesting the Kingdom of God. We do this not merely by *believing* the gospel, but by *becoming* the gospel, the ongoing epiphany of God in the midst of an often-dark world. **NFJ**

—John R. Franke is theologian in residence at Second Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis and general coordinator of the Gospel and Our Culture Network. He is also part of the Nurturing Faith team exploring the Jesus Worldview Initiative.



In the Gospels we see that evangelism and social justice are inseparable elements of the manifestation of the Kingdom of God.

'Only when it's dark enough can we see the stars'

BY GINGER HUGHES

What is happening? This has been a lingering thought as I've scrolled through my newsfeed over the past year:

A white nationalist rally in Virginia. A vehicle driving into a crowd of people, killing one and injuring others. North Korea and the U.S. blustering about who has the biggest bombs and the farthest reach. So many innocent people gunned down at what should have been a fun-filled concert.

What is happening all across this country, across this world?

There has been conflict since the dawn of humanity. We can look back and see violence, hatred, and bigotry played out time and time again. We've all heard the saying that we can't change the past, we can only learn from it. If so, what have we learned?

Have we learned anything from the time in our country marked by slavery?

Have we learned anything from the Holocaust in which some six million Jews were murdered

Have we learned anything from the genocide in Rwanda?

Have we learned anything from the refugees currently living in cardboard boxes and makeshift tents because their homes have been obliterated?

Have we learned anything from all of the violence in our cities and towns, all of the death, all of the sorrow?

Are we better now? Are we wiser? Are we kinder?

I recently listened to one of the most influential leaders of the 20th century who said: "Only when it's dark enough can we see the stars." As the darkness continues to descend around us, I wonder when the stars will emerge.

But as I've asked myself this question, a more pointed insight splinters my thoughts. Perhaps instead of waiting for the stars to emerge, I should recognize my responsibility to become one of them.

Me? Yes. You? Yes. We must decide to shine light and share love because that's what God asks of us.

Most of us want to be light bearers, but we often feel unsure of how to make this happen. Some people would have us believe that if we cannot change the world in total, we might as well not attempt to change it at all. This lie leads to feelings of defeat and apathy.

Failure is not found by our inability to reach millions; failure is realized when we ignore the *one*. Failure is not found when we fail to change the world; failure is demonstrated when we fail to change *our* world.

Each of us has the capacity to be a world changer to *someone* every day.

When we smile and motion for that person to go in front of us at the checkout line, we shine a little light into the darkness.

When we provide some groceries for that family whose pantry is bare, we shine

a light into the darkness.

When we stand up for the *one* who is being made fun of, talked down to or left out, we shine a light into the darkness.

When we hold hands with the sick, are a friend to the lonely or visit the prisoner, we shine light into the darkness.

When we realize that every person we meet regardless of race, creed or socio-economic status is a child of Almighty God, we shine light into the darkness.

When we change the life of *one*, we indeed change the world. Only when the people of light are apathetic, do we fail.

In the midst of a dark world, Martin Luther King Jr. knew something about this when he said, "Only when it is dark enough, can we see the stars."

In the midst of a dark world, another leader some 2,000 years ago, Jesus of Nazareth, knew something about this as well when he said: "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

For centuries people have used stars to navigate their path, to illumine their darkness, to help them find their way. Let us be like the stars, shining light and helping others along their journey.

May we learn something from our past, and may we choose to let our light shine brightly in response. **NFJ**

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Someone's praying, Lord, that we sing 'Kumb ba yah'

By Brett Younger

The next time someone says, "We don't need a Kum ba yah moment," tell them, "I think we do."

Musicians who did not know how to play "Kum ba yah" were once afraid to take their guitars to camp. Many of us remember sitting in front of a crackling fire, trying to find the distance at which our front side was not about to burst into flames and our backside was not frozen. At a deep Kum ba yah level, the warmth of the fire was catching.

Singing "Someone's praying, Lord" felt like praying. "Someone's crying, Lord" felt like shared sorrow. And "Someone's singing, Lord" felt like hope. Lots of us felt that way — and we thought it was cool to sing an African song — even if that was not actually the case.

I learned "Kum ba yah" with hand motions. You can guess the movements for "Someone's praying," "Someone's crying," and "Someone's singing." I wrote new lyrics for which the motions write themselves: "Someone's fishing, Lord," "Someone's itching, Lord," and "Someone's bowling, Lord."

Children of the '60s sang "Kum ba yah" with Pete Seeger; Joan Baez; and Peter, Paul and Mary. Joan Baez' version included the stanza, "No more wars, my Lord." Raffi recorded it for his *Baby Beluga* album. There is a mashup involving Ozzy Osbourne that is not helpful, and a rap metal version "Kumba Yo!" that ministers cannot recommend. Lots of singers have pleaded for God to "Come by here."

We do not know who to thank for "Kum ba yah." One story is that Rev. Martin Frey wrote "Come by Here" in 1939 and taught it to an 11-year-old boy. The

boy's missionary family carried it to Africa, where it was put into the Angolan dialect and brought back to the United States. The problem is that no word close to Kum ba yah exists in any language spoken in Angola.

Versions of the song were recorded in South Carolina as early as 1926. The phrase "Kum ba yah" may be a Gullah version of "Come by here." The first ones to sing "Someone's crying, Lord" were African Americans suffering under Jim Crow laws. (Indefensibly, most hymnals continue to give Martin Frey credit.)

When people mention Kum ba yah today it is usually with cynicism. An African-American spiritual in which hurting people plead for God's help has been turned into a term of derision. You have to wonder if racism is at work when someone says, "I'm not interested in holding hands and singing 'Kum ba yah.'"

Our culture tends to denigrate compassion. To join hands and sing "Kum ba yah" is to pray together, asking God to care for the hurting. Who decided it was helpful to mock the longing for God or the history of an oppressed people? Far from pretending everything is fine, "Kum ba yah" springs from a much-tested faith. Someone's crying, and yet they are still strong enough to sing.

In the civil rights era Kum ba yah was a call to action. Kum ba yah is now shorthand for hopefulness that should not be trusted. A song about looking to God for courage is laughed at for being naïve.

I have grown weary of the way our culture considers cynicism smart and optimism naïve. We have more than enough skepticism, sarcasm and negativism. We need more compassion, warmth and hopefulness. We need to debate less and care more. We need to impress each other not with how many facts we know, but with how honest we are about what we are feeling.

The older I get, the more I long for Kum ba yah moments. I have spent years learning to be suspicious of warm feelings. Now I ache for genuine love.

We do not need sharper reasoning nearly so much as we need new hearts. When we get tired of words, we need to pray for God to fill our souls. We need hope that pushes bitterness away.

Recently at my church's retreat, we sat around a campfire and sang "Kum ba yah." It felt real, and the s'mores were delicious. **NFJ**

—Brett Younger is the senior minister of Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, New York.

Nurturing FAITH™

LESSONS FOR
JANUARY / FEBRUARY 2018

BIBLE STUDIES



The Bible Lessons that anchor the Nurturing Faith Bible Studies are written by Tony Cartledge in a scholarly, yet applicable, style from the wide range of Christian scriptures. A graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (M.Div) and Duke University (Ph.D.), and with years of experience as a pastor, writer, and professor at Campbell University, he provides deep insight for Christian living without “dumbing down” the richness of the biblical texts for honest learners.

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Scripture citations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless otherwise noted.

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Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*



Jan. 7, 2018

Ephesians 3:1-12

The Mystery of the Ages

Do you like mysteries? Many people love nothing better than a week at the beach with a new mystery novel, or watching a crime drama on TV, or researching a thorny question for which they don't know the answer.

We like to see mysteries solved! Whether we're thinking of a child reading Nancy Drew novels, or watching another remake of Sherlock Holmes, or working in a lab in hopes of discovering a cure for cancer, the mystery involved is part of the appeal.

Our texts for the next several weeks are drawn from letters written by the Apostle Paul as he sought to explain what some saw as a great mystery about who God loves and what difference it makes. We begin with Paul's letter to Christians in the city of Ephesus.  


A dangerous mystery (vv. 1-4)

Reading chapter 3 requires some familiarity with previous chapters, for v. 1 begins with "This is the reason that I Paul am a prisoner for Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles" (v. 1).

What does he mean by "this"? The first two chapters reflect on Paul's

Ephesians 3:5 –


"In former generations this mystery was not made known to human-kind, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit . . ."

conviction that God's grace had been made available to Gentiles as well as Jews. Modern readers may have a hard time imagining it being any other way, but most of the Bible was written from a Jewish perspective that divided the world into Jews and Gentiles. The Jews believed they were the sole inheritors of God's promise through Abraham. Rabbinic Judaism as developed during the postexilic period had promoted an increasingly isolationist mindset. 

When Jesus came along, he declared that God loved all peoples and that sincere faith in God was more important than rabbinic law. Jesus called upon fellow Jews to accept this new revelation of God and some did, but the religious establishment did not. Indeed, they saw Jesus as a threat and plotted to eliminate him.

A zealous young rabbi named Saul was among those who did not accept the legitimacy of Jesus' teaching, and he actively sought to arrest and punish Jews who had chosen to follow the crucified teacher. He was traveling to discipline Jewish believers in Damascus when halted by a blinding vision. Jesus challenged Saul to have faith in him and called him to spend the rest of his life reaching out to the very persons he once had hated: he was to become an apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9).

In time, Saul's Jewish name gave way to the Roman name Paul, perhaps to help him relate better to Gentiles. Paul committed himself to reaching all people, enduring many sufferings and persecutions to proclaim the gospel among the Gentiles. His great vision was to foster reconciliation between all of God's people (described in Ephesians 1).

Toward that end, Paul had gone throughout Asia Minor, collecting a relief offering from Gentile churches to aid poor Jews in Jerusalem. Paul hoped that the show of Gentile generosity would soften the hearts of Judaism's leaders, so he brought the offering to Jerusalem, and while there he used some of his own money to assist some Jewish men in fulfilling a vow they had made (Acts 19). 

Even as Paul labored to bring about reconciliation, Jewish opponents falsely accused Paul of breaking the law by bringing Greeks into the temple. They created such a riot that Roman soldiers who kept watch at the temple took Paul into custody for his own safe-keeping.

Later, however, Jewish authorities brought formal charges against Paul, so that the Romans kept him in prison. Paul was moved from Jerusalem to Caesarea, then later transported to Rome. This letter may have originated in a prison cell in Rome.

Paul knew that God's inclusion of Gentiles in the kingdom was a radical idea to traditional Jews. To help them understand, Paul described it as a mystery that had just come to light, one that Jesus had revealed to him along with his commission (vv. 2-4).

A mystery? Tell us more!

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A mystery revealed (vv. 5-6)

Elaborating on the theme, Paul declared that the mystery had not been revealed to previous generations, but that through divine action it “has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (v. 5).

And what is the mystery? Paul states it bluntly: “that is, the Gentiles have become fellow heirs, members of the same body, and sharers in the promise of Christ Jesus through the gospel” (v. 6).

Lest anyone harbor notions that God accepted Gentile believers as anything less than Jews, Paul spells it out in three ways, using three words that employ the same prefix, *syn-*, which means something like “together with.”^u

First, Gentile believers “have become fellow heirs” – they could jointly share in all that it meant to be “heirs of salvation” and all the blessings that come with it. The word Paul uses for “joint heirs” is *sugklēronoma*, the same word he uses elsewhere to describe Christians as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ – inheritors of all the good blessings God has in store (Rom. 8:17; Gal. 3:29, 4:7).

Secondly, Gentile believers are “members of the same body.” The word Paul used to describe this (*sussōma*) is not found anywhere else in the New Testament, in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, or in Greek classical literature, so it is likely that Paul coined the word by combining *syn-* with the word for “body” to suggest that Jewish and Gentile believers are “co-bodied” or “bodied with” one another.^u

A heart, lung, or kidney transplant patient receives organs that originated with other persons, but they all become part of one body that functions well if the host body doesn’t reject the new implants. Fighting rejection is a

challenge for modern medicine, and it was a struggle for the early church for Jews to accept Gentiles as full participants within the body of God’s chosen people.

Thirdly, Gentiles could become “sharers in the promise in Christ Jesus.” Here the word is *summetochos*, which suggests a partnership in which people share everything equally. Both Jews and Gentiles have equal access to every promise that comes through the gospel – the good news — of Jesus Christ.

A mystery proclaimed (vv. 7-13)

It was that gospel, Paul said, that called him into God’s service (v. 7). Paul was clearly proud of his work, but described himself as “the very least of all the saints,” thinking of his calling as a gift of grace that allowed him to bring the good news of “the boundless riches of Christ” to the Gentiles (v. 8), revealing “the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things” (v. 9).

Don’t we enjoy being the bearer of good news? As children or even adults, we may have competed to be the first to share some bit of happy tidings with others. Paul thought it a gift of grace that God allowed him to be a pioneer among those who brought the good news of Christ to the Gentiles.

The hoped-for result, Paul said, was that “through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (v. 10). By “rulers and authorities in the heavenly places,” Paul was referencing a common first-century belief that angelic or demonic powers existed in various heavenly spheres between God and the earth. [See “The Hardest Question” online for a further discussion of ancient cosmology.]

Modern believers are less likely to think of angels and demons ruling

among the planets, but can appreciate Paul’s grand point that the mystery of the gospel has come full circle: in a light from heaven, the Spirit revealed it to Paul (3:3), and then to “apostles and prophets” (3:5), who helped carry the message to all people (3:9), who would create such a church that even the heavenly “rulers and authorities” could see what God was up to (3:10).

The mystery was no new thing, Paul said, but “in accordance with the eternal purpose” that God had carried out through Jesus (v. 11), enabling all people to “have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him” (v. 12).

The privilege of sharing such good news was a continual comfort to Paul even in the face of hardship and imprisonment. Readers should not “lose heart over my sufferings,” he said. Paul considered his own sufferings to be for the sake of those who came to believe, and thus well worth the price: “they are your glory” (v. 13).

This was Paul’s message: through the mystery of the ages, God had a plan to put the fractured peoples of the world back together again by including *everyone* who wanted to belong in the kingdom. That was the good news: God’s love extends to all people, no matter what we have done or what bad habits we have. We are included, even if we don’t yet know much about the Bible or have all our questions answered (and we never will in this life). We’re included because God’s love extends to all humankind.

As newly accepted people of God, Jesus’ family of faith is called to spread that good news in both word and deed, confident that God’s grace and love are sufficient for our present and our future.

The mystery has been revealed: God’s love extends to every person, including each of us. **NFJ**



Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Jan. 14, 2018

1 Corinthians 6:1-20

What Is Best for Me?

Is there room for me in God's kingdom? One might wonder after reading this chapter: Paul could be both strict in his expectations and severe in his judgment. He could also be plain-spoken and abrupt, showing little patience with church members who did not live up to his expectations.

Paul, however, was also a child of his times, as are we. Some things that bothered Paul may not disturb us, while other practices Paul accepted strike us as horrifying. It's helpful to keep this in mind as we consider Paul's letter to the troubled church in Corinth.

Fire one (vv. 1-8)

Paul had a long history with the church, one that included both personal visits and correspondence. The letter of 1 Corinthians was probably written from Ephesus, where he had settled for a while during his second missionary journey. While there, Paul had visitors from "Chloe's people," who reported on a serious division in the church. He also received a letter from the church requesting advice, and apparently wrote what we now call 1 Corinthians to address the concerns that had been raised.

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1 Corinthians 6:19 –

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

Paul began the letter with an appeal to unity based on the centrality of Christ and the gospel of the cross (chs. 1-2) before addressing issues arising from immaturity, factionalism, and arrogance within the church (chs. 3-4). In chapter 5 he tackled sexual immorality in the church, focusing on the case of a man reported to be sleeping with "his father's wife" – perhaps a situation in which a widowed father had married a younger woman and then died, after which his son took up with his step-mother.

That led Paul to a broader insistence that persons who were "sexually immoral or greedy, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard or robber" should be put out of the church (5:11-13).

Similar concerns arise in chapter 6, in which Paul expressed dismay that some members of the church had filed suit against each other in civil court. Keeping in mind that Christians at the time were a small and probably persecuted minority, Paul believed believers should settle matters between themselves rather than expose themselves to embarrassment "before the unrighteous" (v. 1).

Citing a belief that Christians would participate in the final judgment, Paul argued that if "the saints will judge the world" in the hereafter, they should be competent to judge trivial cases in the present (vv. 2-3).

Using rhetorical questions in an intentional effort to incite shame, Paul asked "Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to decide between one believer and another?" (v. 5) The thought of church members taking one another to court before pagan authorities was abhorrent to Paul, as it would besmirch the Christian witness.

In fact, Paul said, the very existence of lawsuits between believers was a sign of defeat. It would be better to suffer loss in silence than to charge one another in civil courts, Paul said – and what was worse, believers were defrauding other believers (vv. 7-8). One can almost see the fiery apostle shaking his head in unbelief that fellow church members would cheat each other, and then fight it out in the public square.

Paul did not cite Jesus, but Matthew's gospel holds that Jesus also encouraged believers to work things out among themselves (Matt. 18:15-17).

Fire two (vv. 9-11)

The apostle's growing ire led him to launch into a catalogue of perceived "wrongdoers" who, he said, would not inherit the kingdom of God (v. 9a). His list includes several categories previously mentioned in 5:11-13 (idolaters, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, and robbers), while expanding the list of sexually immoral persons to include "fornicators ... adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites" (vv. 9b-10, NRSV).

Several of these terms are difficult to translate. The NRSV's rendering "male prostitutes, sodomites" is translated "men who have sex with men" by

NIV11. However understood, the terms apparently refer to male homosexual practices, which Paul condemned.

Should modern readers automatically endorse Paul's views on this? On the one hand, we note that in Paul's day the notion of genetically influenced same-sex gender identity could not have been conceived, and the concept of committed relationships between same-sex partners was not on the table. Homosexual activity was practiced, but often between wealthy adults who abused boys, and through males who sold their services to other males. In that sense, Paul's main exposure to homosexuality was in situations of molestation or a misuse of power, rather than a caring relationship between equals.

We might also consider behaviors that were not on Paul's list – such as slave-holding and human trafficking. The buying and selling of slaves was commonly practiced in the first century, and Paul not only accepted the practice, but also instructed slaves to obey their masters (Eph. 6:5, Col. 3:22). Today we consider such practices as abhorrent – only the lowest of the low would dare think they could own and trade in human beings as if they were mere property.

Whether Paul would have felt differently about slavery or same-sex relationships if he had lived in our day is an open question, but the juxtaposition is a reminder that context is important: what is considered acceptable behavior is often a social construct, and Paul was writing within a very different cultural setting.

The heart of Paul's message is that believers should take the lead in practicing relationships that are mutually beneficial and not abusive toward others. His heated sermon is a reminder that believers who have been “washed ... sanctified ... justified in the name of

the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God” (v. 11) are called to leave selfish and harmful behaviors behind and adopt a new and loving lifestyle.

Fire three (vv. 12-20)

It appears that some believers in Corinth had adopted a dualistic libertinism that separated the spirit from the body, holding that Christ had set their spirits free, and it didn't matter what they did with the body.

Paul appears to have confronted these ideas in the form of a dialogue in which he states a position taken by the Corinthians, then refutes it. This is not at all evident in the familiar KJV, but modern translations such as NRSV, NIV11, NET, and HCSB put certain statements in quotes to indicate that Paul was citing their views.

We can't be certain that this was intended, because Paul did not say “you say ... but I say,” and the Greek text does not use quotation marks. Still, this appears to be the best way of understanding Paul's method.

Some Corinthians apparently held that “All things are lawful for me.” Paul did not deny the statement outright, and may have used it himself in specific contexts such as a debate about whether Christians were compelled to follow the dietary restrictions of Judaism.

Thought it might be true in some cases to say “All things are lawful for me,” Paul insisted “but not all things are beneficial,” noting that some things have the power to dominate one's life (v. 12). Making money, eating sweets, drinking wine, and taking naps may all be lawful, but letting any of those dominate our life can cause serious physical and relational problems.

“Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food,” some might have said, but Paul reminded them that

neither was permanent (v. 13a). Paul then made an interesting shift from eating to sex: “The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (v. 13b). Notice the parallel construction: instead of “food for the stomach and the stomach for food,” the more important concept is “the body for the Lord and the Lord for the body.”

Though the body is destined for death and disintegration, Paul reminded the Corinthians, “God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power” (v. 14). We can't pretend that what we do with our body doesn't matter. There is more to sex than a physical act, and those who think that casual sex has no spiritual consequences are mistaken (vv. 15-18).

When believers invite Christ to take over their lives, there is a sense in which their bodies take on a sacred dimension: “... do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?” (v. 19).

We no longer belong to ourselves, Paul said. “For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body” (v. 20).

When we consider what behaviors are appropriate, perhaps the most important question is not what is wrong with something, but what is right with it. Will it add something positive to my life and to others, or is there potential for harm? Will it draw me closer to God, or lead me away?

What we do or don't do with our bodies – how well we care for them, as well as how we use them – can bring glory or shame to the God we serve, to Christ who indwells us through the Spirit.

When we're considering any action that could be questionable, that's an appropriate thing to keep in mind. **NFJ**

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Jan. 21, 2018

1 Corinthians 7:25-40

A Question of Matrimony

What do we do with a text whose author's advice is based on a premise that turned out to be incorrect – at least in the way he expected?

That's precisely what we find in 1 Cor. 7:25-40, where Paul based a series of opinions about marriage on the assumption that Christ's return was just around the corner and life as usual was coming to an end. ⚡

He was wrong.

Almost 2,000 years later, the world is still chugging along and Christ has not returned.

But Paul was also right.

People who follow Jesus no longer belong entirely to the world as it is, but are called to live as citizens of God's kingdom who seek to realize kingdom values in their daily living.

What do we do with a text such as this? Many choose to ignore it, while others misinterpret it. Let's see if we can take a responsible and helpful approach to Paul's comments about sex and marriage in an uncertain world.

Personal preferences (vv. 25-28)

We begin with a word of context. Chapter 7 marks a clear shift in 1 Corin-

1 Corinthians 7:25 –

“Now concerning virgins, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.”

thians, as Paul turns from issues that had been raised by “Chloe's people” to questions raised in a letter he had received from the church. ⚡

While chapter 6 addressed an apparent faction of church members who had adopted an anything-goes approach to sex outside of marriage, in chapter 7 Paul responds to some who apparently promoted the ideals of a sexless marriage – a possible contributor to the problems addressed in the previous chapter!

Paul was unmarried, but understood that sexual relations are an innate and appropriate aspect of marriage that should continue, lest people be tempted to seek sex outside of marriage (vv. 1-2). Husbands and wives should willingly engage in conjugal relations with their spouses, he said (v. 3), recognizing that each had a certain authority over the other's body (v. 4). ⚡ Paul conceded that spouses might abstain from relations for a set period to focus on prayer, but only by mutual agreement, and then to avoid temptation (vv. 5-6).

While Paul wished that others shared his choice of a single and celibate life, he saw celibacy as a spiritual gift that few people possessed (v. 7). He encouraged unmarried persons to remain unmarried and focus on Christian service, but recognized that marriage was preferable to continual frustration for those who

did not have the gift of celibacy (vv. 8-9), and believed that married people should stay married, even if they had converted while their spouses had not (vv. 10-16). ⚡

After digressing to state a general belief that all believers should remain in the state they were in when called to faith (vv. 17-24), Paul returned to the questions asked by the church, one of which had to do with “virgins” (v. 25).

We can't be certain, but Paul was probably addressing a question about whether young people who were engaged should proceed with their marriages. Here he chose to tread carefully, noting that he had no clear “word of the Lord” on the subject, but was willing to share his opinion “as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.”

And Paul was not short on opinions. He believed it was better for believers to remain as they were, whether married or unmarried. The basis of Paul's opinion was “in view of the impending crisis,” or better, “in view of the present necessity” (v. 26) – his belief that Christ would return soon.

Those who were married need not dissolve their marriage, and those who were single need not be in search of a partner, he said (v. 27). Speaking from the perspective of a bachelor who cherished his freedom from marital obligations, Paul added: “Yet those who marry will experience distress in this life, and I would spare you that” (v. 28b).

The one-sided nature of Paul's experience is apparent. Without having experienced the positive and fulfilling aspects of marriage, Paul could not appreciate the ways in which a shared life can reduce stress and multiply joy,

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enabling spouses to live more happily and effectively in other areas of life, as well.

Eschatological assumptions (vv. 29-31)

With v. 29 we come to the crux of Paul's position: "And I say this, brothers and sisters: The time is short. So then those who have wives should be as those who have none, those with tears like those not weeping, those who rejoice like those not rejoicing, those who buy like those without possessions, those who use the world as though they were not using it to the full. For the present shape of this world is passing away" (vv. 29-31, NET).

This reminds us that Paul's advice in this chapter is largely situational. His unequivocally eschatological outlook rendered long-term planning about marriage, work-related matters, or other cares of the world almost irrelevant. In his view, even states of mourning or happiness had become immaterial. Likewise, poverty, wealth, and social engagement become inconsequential if the present world is about to end.

Paul was speaking to a very different situation than the one in which we live. He was dealing with a church in which some had responded to the eschatological expectations by thinking it didn't matter how much sex they had, or with whom – while others thought any sex was inappropriate as they awaited the end of the age.

Many years later, it is evident that Paul's apocalyptic predictions were misplaced, and we have no reason to think we should not be planning for the long haul in life and in relationships.

Thus, Paul's opinion that concerns about marriage were entirely secondary to evangelizing the world before Christ's imminent return doesn't necessarily apply to us. Jesus' teachings suggested the expectation of a quick

return, but he also made it clear that no one knew when the end would come, and that even he did not know (Mark 13:32 and parallels).^U This means we *do* need to be thinking about long-term commitments such as marriage and child-raising and involvement in matters affecting both society and the environment.

This is one of those cases where too much attention to a single biblical text – without an appropriate understanding of its situational context – can be more harmful than helpful. Some modern Christians, for example, see no need to be concerned about global warming, the depletion of energy resources, or overpopulation, because they believe the second coming of Christ will circumvent any need for long-term planning or care for the environment.

None of us can say how long we will be on this earth, whether our end comes through death or through divine intervention – but all of us should live responsibly and with an eye toward caring for future generations as well as our own.

Devotional distractions (vv. 32-40)

In the latter part of the chapter, Paul continues discussing the pros and cons of marriage, though clearly from a satisfied bachelor's point of view. In vv. 32-34, he said "I want you to be free from anxieties," but what he meant was "I want you to be worried about pleasing God and not about pleasing your spouse."

It is true that married persons have responsibilities and cares (including children) that celibate singles do not have. It is also true that the steady love and mutual support one finds in a good marriage can nurture a stable foundation for effective Christian living, but such a thought does not seem to have crossed Paul's mind.

At least Paul was honest about his motives: he preferred being single but did not wish "to put any restraint" on those who chose to marry. His motive was "to promote good and unhindered devotion to the Lord" (v. 35), which he thought marriage could impede.

This thought carries into vv. 36-38, which are difficult to translate, because we do not know if Paul was addressing fathers who were concerned about giving their daughters in marriage, or young men who were engaged.^U In either case, Paul congratulated those who kept their desires under control and thus chose to refrain from marriage, which he believed to be the better course (vv. 37-38).

Paul closed the discussion of marriage with a word to widows, noting that they were free to marry another believer ("only in the Lord"), though he thought a widow would be "more blessed if she remains as she is" (vv. 39-40). He closed with a reminder that he was speaking his own opinions, though confident "that I have the Spirit of God."

If 1 Corinthians 7 were a song, it would have several verses, but all on the same theme: Paul's belief that the end was near and that the ordinary human concerns associated with marital obligations should take a back seat to devoting oneself to serving Christ full time.

As responsible readers, we must keep in mind the situational nature of Paul's advice. While we are indeed called to follow Christ's teachings and live out kingdom values from day to day, we need not share Paul's fervent belief that the days are short. Indeed, if the church is to have a future, it will be important for Christian couples to demonstrate the positive aspects of marriage and to raise up future generations of disciples. **NFJ**

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Jan. 28, 2018

1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Are You Going to Eat That?

If you are of a certain age or grew up in a conservative community, perhaps you can remember when many church members seriously debated whether Christians should patronize restaurants that served alcohol.

If a Sunday School class wanted to hold a fellowship meal in a local eatery, it was generally necessary to find a “family restaurant” to ensure participation from members who did not wish to be around people who were drinking or to feel that they were supporting the alcohol industry.

These days, as most counties have gone from “dry” to “wet,” bars in local restaurants and aisles of wine and beer in grocery stores have become so commonplace that many of us rarely think about the issue. Young people might find the whole idea to be completely alien.


Some readers might find it equally strange to consider an issue raised in 1 Corinthians 8: Is it okay to eat meat that had been part of a sacrifice in a pagan temple?

A troublesome question (vv. 1-3)

The point of contention, which Paul deals with over the space of three

1 Corinthians 8:6 –

“Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”


chapters, is broader than the question of eating meat that had been offered to idols: it also concerns the whole notion of the relationship between a believer’s individual freedom and his or her concern for the Christian community as a whole. 

How does one live as a Christian within a culture where other gods or ideals predominate? Before asking the question of ourselves, we must understand the context of the question at Corinth: after all, we are reading someone else’s mail, and need to appreciate their situation.

Corinth was a cosmopolitan city steeped in Greek and Roman traditions that included the worship of numerous gods. The temples also served as social hubs where people gathered for banquets in dining halls attached to the sanctuaries. Animal sacrifices on outdoor altars were a customary part of worship there, but only a ritual part of the animal was burned: most of it was cooked and served in the temple banquet halls or sold in local meat markets.

Some of the believers in Corinth thought eating such meat was wrong, while others saw it as a non-issue and had little patience with those who quibbled. Their attitude seemed to be “we all know better” than to think it should matter.

There was probably a social aspect to the division of opinion. The church’s wealthier and more educated members were more likely to be invited to temple banquets, which they may have seen as a necessary aspect of business or societal networking, such as attending a Rotary Club meeting at a local restaurant or celebrating a friend’s wedding at a private club. Poorer and less educated members probably ate little meat to begin with, and may have been more prone to lingering suspicions about the pagan gods’ power.

Paul’s initial response was to change the direction of the question: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up” (v. 1).  With this statement, Paul insists from the beginning that love trumps knowledge. Those who think they are so smart – “who claim to know something” – still have things to learn, he said (v. 2). What’s important is not what we know, but *that we are known* by God (v. 3).

This is a reminder that salvation arose from God’s initiative: it’s not what we know about God that counts, but that God knows us. We did not earn our salvation or gain it through obtaining knowledge, and should not let what we know lead us to look down upon those who know less.

The heart of the problem (vv. 4-6)

Those who had no qualms about eating meat offered to idols reasoned that in Christ they had come to know the only true God. If other gods did not exist, then idols meant nothing and meat offered to idols was only meat (v. 4). In responding, it’s likely that Paul was quoting from the letter he had received,

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apparently penned by the faction that favored eating meat from the temples.

Paul did not disagree with their logic, but questioned its application. He acknowledged that the pervasive “gods and lords” of Corinth and elsewhere were only “so-called” gods rather than real entities – but that did not change the widespread acceptance and power of their cults – they were everywhere (v. 5). Later, Paul would connect sacrifices to idols with the worship of demons (10:20): not all believers saw the idols as meaningless.

Continuing his effort to keep the focus on the believers’ relationship with God, Paul cited what was probably part of an early hymn known to the Corinthians: “For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (v. 6).^U

The point for Paul was not whether other gods existed, but that all things existed because of God, and Christians existed because of Christ. Believers have a purpose beyond themselves: we exist for God. As such, our priority is to love God and to love others, rather than to serve ourselves.

The loving thing to do (vv. 7-13)

Having re-centered the discussion, Paul returned to the matter at hand, beginning with the claim some were making that “all of us possess knowledge” (v. 1), which we could read as “we all know that idols aren’t real.” Paul begs to differ, arguing that “... not everyone ... has this knowledge” (v. 7a).

Some in the church had worshipped idols for so long that “they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol” (v. 7b). Being “weak” in the faith on this matter, the thought of going back to the temple or eating “idol meat” disturbed them.

Paul’s response pointed out that the “we all know” faction was excluding fellow church members who thought differently. They might legitimately argue that eating meat offered to a non-existent god would not affect their relationship to the real God (v. 8), but Paul insisted they should “take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak” (v. 9).^U

The word rendered “liberty” in the NRSV normally means “authority.” Paul’s concern was that stronger believers not lean on their rights, but think of relationships when making decisions. Suppose one convinced a weaker believer that it was okay to dine at the temple, but the experience of eating there sucked the weaker brother or sister back into the sway of the pagan cult they had known for so long (v. 10). “So by your knowledge those weak believers for whom Christ died are destroyed,” Paul wrote (v. 11).

Note Paul’s strong language – the danger was not that the weak would be offended by others’ exercise of “knowledge,” but that they would be *destroyed*. Note also Paul’s careful reminder that Christ had died for those believers. If Christ gave his life for the sake of the weaker brothers and sisters, shouldn’t the stronger believers be willing to change their eating habits in order to preserve them?

Those who sin against family members by “wounding” their consciences also sin against Christ, Paul said (v. 12), citing his own willingness to forgo meat altogether rather than to lead weaker members to violate their conscience and go astray (v. 13).

Good enough: but how might this matter apply in our own day? We may know fellow Christians who choose not to eat meat, but not because of scruples involving idol worship. That

is not our issue. The central message of the text is that love and concern for one another is more important than exercising one’s prerogatives.

But the text also raises the question of where the idols are in our own day. Are we tempted to put such trust in the materialistic ethos of our culture that we disregard the poor or seek only “our kind” when doing outreach? Are we so concerned with our own pleasure that we fail to consider others’ needs? Are there some who put allegiance to the nation on par with allegiance to God, leading weaker members to confuse patriotism with faith?

While we must take Paul’s point seriously, we must also be careful, as Richard B. Hayes has noted, not to let “the most narrow-minded and legalistic members of the church” hold the rest of the Christian community hostage to their strict interpretation of how Christians should behave (*First Corinthians*, Interpretation [Westminster John Knox Press, 2011], 145).

We may have different opinions about whether dancing or drinking wine or same-sex marriages are acceptable, for example, but those are not issues that should lead weak persons to desert the faith.

On the other hand, Hayes notes, we must remember that “idolatry *can* actually lead to destruction.” Our world has its own idols, he wrote, and “If we are tempted to be casual about dalliances with the idols that rule our culture’s symbolic world (primarily the gods of wealth, military power, and self-gratification), we would do well to reread 1 Corinthians 8 and consider the possible risks for those among us who are seeking to escape the pull of these forces” (Ibid.).

Eating idol meat may not be an issue for us, but Paul’s discussion of it still provides us with much food for thought. **NFJ**



Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

New password for online teaching resources is: Grow.

Feb. 4, 2018

1 Corinthians 9:16-23

Any Volunteers?

My home county has a nice population of both wild turkeys and turkey hunters. The local newspaper faithfully publishes a photograph of the first hunter to kill a turkey each season, along with the turkey, its weight, and the length of its “beard.” The caption invariably notes that the turkey was taken “in an undisclosed location,” as the hunters guard their best (and possibly baited) spots with considerable secrecy.

Local woodsmen know both where and when to look for potential victims. They also know how to use a turkey call to attract the big toms. The same hunters may also be proficient in the use of a duck call, or in rattling old deer antlers to simulate two battling bucks, but when they are hunting turkeys, they stick to a turkey call.

Most of us don’t have to look far to discover churches that are hunting turkeys with duck calls or deer antlers, and it doesn’t take a strategic analyst to discern why they are not growing. Churches that do effective outreach make the effort to identify the cultural backgrounds and the prevailing attitudes of their communities. They understand that you don’t reach young apartment dwellers with run-down facilities and tired, repetitive worship.

1 Corinthians 9:16 –

“If I proclaim the gospel, this gives me no ground for boasting, for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!”

They can see that retirement communities will probably not respond to contemporary praise worship. They recognize that many techniques used effectively in the 1950s or the 1990s may fall flat today.

Appreciating the importance of effective communication and flexibility is nothing new. When the church was still so young that it struggled to emerge from its cradle, the Apostle Paul emphasized the importance of understanding other people, adapting to their needs, and communicating on their level. ↓

A question of rights (vv. 16-18)

For Paul, a positive witness begins with the believer’s own sense of identity before Christ. In the previous two chapters Paul addressed issues of contention in the church. Did people have the right to marry (ch. 7)? Did they have the right to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols (ch. 8)?

Paul acknowledged that while believers may have certain liberties, they should remember that building relationships was more important than preserving rights.

Chapter 9 may appear to go on a different track, but it is really Paul’s continuing argument that one should not let personal rights get in the way of encouraging other believers: he

came back to the subject of eating meat offered to idols in chapter 10.

Paul began chapter 9 by making an extended case for why those who devote themselves to preaching the gospel have every right to receive financial and other support from the churches (vv. 1-7).

Soldiers don’t have to provide their own food. Planters drink wine from their vines, shepherds drink milk from their flock, oxen eat from the grain they thresh, and priests share in the offerings brought to the temple (vv. 8-13). “In the same way,” Paul said, “the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (v. 14).

Though he defended the right of other missionaries or pastors to receive pay, Paul pointedly refused to demand support for himself. He may have been the premier evangelist of his time, but he did not require large honoraria or posh lodgings. He didn’t wear ostentatious jewelry and claim its purpose was to demonstrate God’s blessing, as modern “prosperity preachers” do. For that matter – though he had the right to benefit from his missionary efforts – Paul didn’t expect anyone to buy him lunch or cover his travel expenses: he found enough work to support himself. ↓

Nor did Paul brag about his accomplishments. He didn’t see his missionary career as a means to gain material rewards or garner popular praise, but as a divine obligation, saying “woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” (v. 16). His work was not a self-directed enterprise, but a commission from God (v. 17), and he considered the privilege

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of unselfishly preaching the gospel to be all the reward he needed (v. 18).

Intentional adjustments (vv. 19-23)

Paul's basic approach was to put other people first. He regarded himself as free in Jesus – freed by grace from legalistic obligations and bound only by the law of Christ. ⤵

Yet, Paul recognized the gospel imperative of sharing the gospel in effective ways, and he knew that starts with building relationships. He also understood that cultivating relationships with people of different cultural backgrounds could impose some restrictions on him, but he accepted those limitations gladly because he recognized their purpose (v. 19).

“To the Jews I became as a Jew,” Paul said, “in order to win Jews” (v. 20). When Paul was living and working in a Jewish town, for example, he followed Jewish customs of eating kosher food and observing Sabbath rest. Paul recognized that he was no longer bound by Hebrew purity rules or the extensive oral tradition of the rabbis, but he was willing to live “as one under the law” in order to win “those under the law” (v. 21a). When he worked and taught among Jewish people, Paul accepted their customs: he did not ask for milk with his mutton or fail to wash his hands in the accepted way.

Likewise, when Paul worked among Gentiles who had never been subject to Jewish law, he acculturated himself to local practice (v. 21b). He accepted the food that was offered to him without thought for whether it was pork, or whether it was killed in ceremonial fashion with a rabbi's blessing. Early Judaism accepted proselytes from other backgrounds, but only on its own terms. Paul sought

to persuade people by reaching out to them on their own terms.

This does not mean that Paul felt free to do whatever he liked. He did not practice immorality because he worked among an immoral people. He did not adopt foul language so he could relate to profane persons.

Paul exercised reason and common sense in his dealings with others. He recognized that he was never free of his obligation to God's ultimate law of love as revealed in Christ (compare Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14, 6:2). Paul was never free to become hateful to others or to be unethical in his dealings, but he was just as free to adapt his eating and living habits as he was free to switch his spoken language from Hebrew to Greek when the situation required. ⤵

Paul spoke not only of persons with different cultural backgrounds, but also differing levels of maturity. Some people in Corinth, perhaps harboring old superstitions, refused to eat any meat that might have been offered to an idol. Paul regarded such scruples as a sign of weakness, yet he still chose to adopt their practice if it meant winning more people to Christ and causing fewer to stumble: “To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some,” he said (v. 22). ⤵

“I have become all things to all people” sounds like a remarkable capitulation, but Paul made it clear that his adaptability remained within the bounds of “the law of Christ,” and that it functioned for the purpose of reaching others. Paul recognized his own radical freedom in Christ, but never forgot that the freedom Christ gives is subservient to the obedience Christ deserves. That obedience is not without reward (v. 23). ⤵

Disciplined effort (vv. 24-27)

Paul did not believe in wasting effort, either through carelessness or a lack of personal discipline. His evangelistic efforts were based on intentional strategies for mission (vv. 19-23) and personal self-control (vv. 24-27). He illuminated this with the familiar illustration of running a race. Paul did not just run for the sake of running, as recreational joggers do: he ran to win (v. 24).

Though stressing the importance of winning, Paul was not suggesting that only one winner would gain entrance to the kingdom. The race of faith is not a competition with others, but with ourselves. Can we practice self-discipline and trust so firmly in Christ that we can avoid getting sidetracked, slowing down, abandoning the race, or prematurely concluding that we have arrived?

As athletes learn to practice self-control, so believers need to run with discipline, Paul said (v. 25). The goal is not so much to outrun others but to run with purpose, finish faithfully, and not be disqualified (vv. 26-27). If we finish faithfully, we win.

We learn with experience that the race we run is not on a level track or always in daylight. It may lead us into places we didn't expect to go, with many tempting detours that would take us off the track. Often our race is more like an obstacle course run in the fog, or even in the dark. Sometimes it is all we can do to see the path and put one foot in front of the other: it takes both commitment to the task and focus on the path to persevere.

Paul challenges us to ask how our own race is coming, and that of our church. Our challenge is not to capitulate to our culture, but to understand it and reach out in effective ways as we call others to join us on the kingdom course. **NFJ**



Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Feb. 11, 2018

2 Corinthians 4:1-6

Have You Seen the Light?

Has anyone ever doubted your knowledge or advice? If so, how did you respond? In some cases, knowing your audience, you may have judged that defending your expertise might not be worth the effort. In other situations, you may have explained how your age, education, or previous experience had prepared you to know what you were talking about.

In 2 Corinthians, Paul was writing to a church torn by strife and weakened by misguided behavior. Some within the church did not accept Paul's right to advise the congregation, but the apostle was determined to have his say. In today's text, Paul insists his focus is on Christ, whose light he has received, and on serving others for Christ's sake.

Paul had begun the letter with typical greetings, then spoke of his suffering for the gospel and his desire to see the Corinthians face-to-face, though he had decided to delay rather than make another "painful visit" (2:1). Paul had written "with much distress and anguish of heart," he said, "not to cause you pain, but to let you know the love that I have for you" (2:3). A brief discourse on the importance of forgiving others (2:4-11) led Paul into a lengthy defense of his position as an

2 Corinthians 4:5 –

"For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake."

authoritative apostle whose ministry had borne much fruit and brought glory to God (2:14-4:6). Today's text is the closing argument in that section.

Bold apostles (vv. 1-2)

Paul insisted that he had not sought to lord his authority over the Corinthians, noting that his ministry had also derived from God's mercy: "since it is by God's mercy we are engaged in this ministry ..." (v. 1).

By "this ministry" (*diakonos*), Paul refers to his proclamation of the new covenant in Christ, which he referred to in the previous chapter as a "ministry of the Spirit" (3:6, 8).

Paul knew that he was no less in need of God's mercy than anyone else. He had been guilty of persecuting Christians before Christ appeared to him in a light from heaven and led him to someone who could explain to him how God's mercy and forgiveness had been made available through Christ (Acts 9, 1 Cor. 15:10).

The apostle had suffered much for the gospel, and nearly died due to various persecutions (2 Cor. 1:8-11). Yet, because Paul remembered the mercy he had been shown, he did not lose heart, but persevered with boldness despite opposition from both outside and inside the church.

Paul wanted the Corinthians to appreciate his unselfish service to

them – but some members of the church had apparently accused him of religious hucksterism, twisting the gospel to serve his own ends. Few things bring more hurt or frustration than being wrongly accused or criticized by someone we're trying to help.

Some must have accused Paul of hidden motives, for he insisted that he had no secret agenda to serve his own purposes, and he refused "to practice cunning or to falsify God's word" (v. 2a). Had someone criticized him because he no longer believed it necessary to follow the purity laws of Leviticus or Numbers? Did some think Paul was mistreating the scriptures by preaching grace over obedience to rabbinic law?

Many churches faced conflict when Jewish-Christian preachers arrived to "correct" Paul and insist that believers had to keep the Jewish law in addition to following Jesus' teachings. Had this happened in Corinth?

Paul insisted that he always spoke the truth. He had not watered down the gospel in order to increase its appeal, but preached what had been revealed to him through Christ. Anyone who judged him with a clear conscience in God's sight, he said, should be able to see that (v. 2b).


Blinded minds (vv. 3-4)

Perhaps some people had charged Paul with preaching an obscure message that was hard to understand, for he went on to say that "even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing" (v. 3). Here and in the following verses Paul was alluding to the Old Testament story of

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how Moses had to veil his face after meeting with God because his visage shown so brightly that the Israelites were afraid to come near him. 

Paul first declared that if people didn't understand his gospel, it was because they had become blind to it – in other words, the veil was on their eyes, not on his words. They were too involved with “the god of this world” to hear Paul's words clearly (v. 4a).

Paul appeared to be suggesting a supernatural cause for disbelief. In his mind, perhaps, only some evil power could keep people from joyfully receiving the gospel of grace, “from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (v. 4b).

Paul would have known, however, that claiming “the devil made me do it” is a false premise. We make our own decisions, whether good or bad, including the choice of whether we will be open or closed to the gospel message. It's possible that Paul spoke metaphorically of the temptations of society and culture as “the god of this world.” He would have understood, as we do, that whatever we give our primary allegiance to effectively becomes a god to us – a false god, but a god nonetheless. (See “The Hardest Question” online for more on this.)

Shining glory (vv. 5-6)

Paul's continued defense appears to be a response to critics who charged that he was too proud or overbearing, or that he talked about himself too much – although defending himself against their criticism required him to speak of his own beliefs and actions even more.

On the tail of his comments about those whose insight is veiled by “the god of this world,” Paul asserted “For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and

ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake” (v. 5).

Paul maintained that he did not wish to promote himself but to promote Christ, and his method was not to lord it over the Corinthians (1:24), but to serve them – indeed, to be their “slave.” Some, no doubt, would have laughed at this notion, for Paul also spoke of the Corinthians as his spiritual children, challenged them to imitate him, and expected them to answer to his authority (1 Cor. 4:14-21).

Was Paul's rhetoric effective? We might argue, as Queen Gertrude charged in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, that he “doth protest too much.” Some may have charged Paul with talking out of both sides of his mouth, acting like an authoritative parent while also claiming to be their slave.

But isn't that the role of parents when their children are young? Parents must exercise authority in caring for their children, keeping them safe, and teaching them to be responsible persons. On the other hand, parents are essentially slaves of their children: they get up for 2 a.m. feedings, they cook and clean and provide clothing for their offspring, they cart them around to school and sports and other activities.

Good parents have to play the roles of both authority figures and slaves, and they do it for the good of their children. So Paul could speak of himself in both ways without dissimulation despite the critique of his opponents.

Perhaps Paul's strongest defense was his apostolic call, the blinding vision on the way to Damascus through which Jesus challenged him to stop persecuting Christians and become one (Acts 9). The very God who created the world and sent Christ into it was the source of his authority,

Paul believed. “For it is the God who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness’ who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6).

Some critics may have scoffed at Paul's account of his vision and called him crazy, for later he would say “For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you” (5:13).

As Paul had been overwhelmed by the light of Christ on the Damascus Road and through later revelations, so he sought to overwhelm his opponents by piling up impressive images of “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (v. 4), and God's initiative “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (v. 6).

Again, Paul was looking back to the image of Moses, whose face shone after being in the presence of God. Paul believed he had seen the bright glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and that vision had changed his life. It was the bedrock of his faith, and he wouldn't back down from it.

Paul hoped the Corinthians would accept the story of his call as a mark of his authority, while also appreciating his role as a servant of the church who was willing to suffer deprivation and accusation to bring the gospel to all people. Paul wanted others to experience the grace and glory of God-in-Christ even as he had, and gladly defended his efforts to that end.

Paul's defense of his own devotion challenges us to examine our relationship with Christ. Is it a life-changing reality that inspires us to testify of God's grace through service to others – or must we confess that our faith is a thin veneer that has little effect on our daily living?

What do we want it to be? **NFJ**



Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Feb. 18, 2018

Genesis 9:1-17

A Global Promise

Have you ever had to reboot a computer, a router, or a cell phone? The memory of such devices can become corrupt or overloaded, making it necessary to hit “reset” or to unplug the device and start over.

A student once came by my office to express chagrin at her performance on a midterm exam. She explained that she had kept up with the assignments, but had a hard time being open to the new learnings that come with an academic study of scripture. “I just wish I could hit reset,” she said.

Sometimes we manage to mess things up and wish we could “hit reset” in our personal lives, or in our relationship with God. Have you ever felt that way? The human proclivity for falling short is well known. We often need a personal reboot: Christians call that “repentance.”

The season of Lent annually provides just that opportunity, and that’s why it’s so important for Christian believers.

This week’s lesson is the first of six lessons for this year’s Lenten season. All are taken from the Old Testament, and all of them deal with some aspect of the theme of “covenant.” Christian believers do not live under the

Genesis 8:13 –

“I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.”

same covenant(s) that the scriptures say God established with Israel, but under a new covenant in Christ. Even so, the concept of living in a covenant relationship with God is worth considerable reflection.

A new start (v. 1)

Our first text follows the biblical account of a destructive flood that God reportedly sent to cleanse the earth after humankind had proven to be irredeemably corrupt. Only the family of Noah, described as “a righteous man, blameless in his generation” (6:9), was spared.

Flood stories were common among ancient Near Eastern peoples, and even the biblical story is told in two versions. The earliest version of the post-flood account, attributed to an author known as the “Yahwist,” is found in 8:20-22. It describes Noah’s offering of a sacrifice. After smelling the pleasing smoky fragrance, Yahweh promised to “never again curse the ground because of humankind” or to “ever again destroy every creature as I have done,” because “the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth” (8:21).

Today’s text, Genesis 9:1-17, is from the “Priestly” (P) source, which was probably later. Its account of the post-deluvian exchange between God and Noah, like its version of the flood story, is considerably longer.

The account includes a divine blessing (“God blessed Noah and his sons”) and a reprise of Gen. 1:28-30, beginning with the familiar command to “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (v. 1, repeated in v. 7). The writer sees the post-flood reset as similar to the first creation story (also P), in which God instructed humankind to populate the earth and care for it.

New rules (vv. 2-7)

The new command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” marks continuity with the creation story of Gen. 1:1-2:4a, but with a twist: life would be different. The post-creation story had expected both humans and animals to be vegetarians:

“God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so” (1:29-30).

Now, however, humans are given authority to eat everything else, giving animals cause to fear them:

“The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything” (vv. 2-3).

There is no mention of “clean” and “unclean” animals, because the

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Priestly writer did not recognize the dietary laws of *kashrut* (kosher foods) prior to Leviticus, when Moses reportedly handed down the first rules in an evolving system of dietary restrictions designed to make the Hebrews ethnically distinctive.

All animals were fair game: they could be killed and eaten so long as their blood was properly drained. Blood, as the source of life, belonged to God alone (v. 4).

The mention of blood led to a warning that humans should not kill each other (v. 5), making murder a capital offense – a penalty also known from the earliest extant law code, that of Ur-Nammu, a Sumerian king who lived in the 20th century BCE.

A primary reason for the command is obscured in most modern translations: in the context of a narrative in which only Noah's family survived, anyone killed would be a close relative: the text identifies the victim as "his brother." The poetic verse that follows gives an additional reason: human life should be respected because we are made in the image of God (v. 6).

On the one hand, the rule highlights the value of human life, but it also calls for the loss of another. Some supporters of capital punishment rely on biblical citations such as this to justify state-sponsored killing. We should not neglect other teachings, however: Jesus called his followers to move beyond the concept of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" and learn to forgive rather than seek vengeance (Matt. 5:38-48).

Interestingly, the command to kill people who kill (which would decrease the population) is followed by a repetition of the command to "be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it" (v. 7).

A new promise (vv. 8-17)

The following verses are often referred to as the "Noahic Covenant," mainly because the text says God told Noah and his sons "I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark" (vv. 8-10).

Covenants typically involve two parties who agree on mutually required commitments, but in this case the "covenant" is more of a straightforward promise from God. Other than the commands previously given, God asks nothing in return for the promise that "never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth" (v. 11).

Take note that the "covenant" – really a declaration of divine grace – is not only for the sake of humans, but also for all living creatures of the earth. The earlier Yahwist's version of God's post-flood promise was simply that God would not curse the ground or destroy all living creatures again (8:21): the Priestly writer was more focused on the promise that God would not do it by means of a flood.

In vv. 12-17 we find the text behind the favorite children's story of how God gave the rainbow as a sign of the promise that humans need not fear another population-cleansing flood. Though it's often told as if God created rainbows for that moment, rainbows have existed as long as there have been conditions in which sunlight is refracted through and reflected back from water droplets in the atmosphere. When seen from an airplane, rainbows form a full circle, but we are more familiar with the full or partial arc that we see from ground level.


The story says the rainbow was given as a sign of God's promise not to send another flood, an indication that humans need not fear an inundation whenever they see a thunderstorm approaching.

Though we commonly use the word "rainbow," the biblical story speaks only of a "bow," the same word used for the weapon designed to shoot arrows. Many of Israel's neighbors believed in storm gods, such as Baal Resheph, who were thought to shoot lightning bolts to the earth as an indication of divine anger.

The writer who preserved this story played off this belief to declare that God had set aside the divine war bow – pointing it away from the earth – and made it a symbol of peace. We often fail to note that the bow was to be a reminder to God, not to humans: "When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth" (v. 16).

As people familiar with modern meteorology, we look for something more in this story than an etiology for why rainbows exist. The story testifies of a belief that God not only created the earth, but also continues to rule over all creation, and is capable of intervening in worldly matters.

The story reminds us that human sin matters and can lead to judgment, but it also points to the preeminence of divine grace: even in a world of people so degenerate that "every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (6:5), God found a way to show mercy and to offer humankind another chance.

Perhaps this story may also offer hope to us when we feel that we are drowning in the consequences of our sin: God's ultimate intention is for our good, and grace reigns.  NFI

Bible Study *with Tony W. Cartledge*

Feb. 25, 2018

Genesis 17:1-16

A Covenant Family

If you've ever been involved in choosing a baby's name, you know it can be complicated. Unless there's a family tradition for a child to take on the name of a parent or relative, the field is wide open.

Parents may think grand thoughts about the perfect name that will sound just right or stamp the child with a unique image for life. Parents-to-be put a lot of thought into names and a lot of money into the pockets of people who publish books such as *10,000 Names for Your Baby*. With all that effort, we can still go astray: I'm sure you know people who have never liked their name, or you can think of some names you've heard but would never use.

Our text tells the story of a man who had no choice in the naming of his child, but he just laughed about it. In fact, that *was* the name of his child: "*he laughs*." It's a story so good you may find it hard to believe, but I doubt that a single person in the story would care if you do or not.

A lasting covenant (vv. 1-8)

The name of the man was Abram, and the story claims he was 99 years old when this story took place. 99. He was old, but he was active. Abram had

Genesis 17:16 –

"Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, 'Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?'"

moved from his home in Mesopotamia on the strength of God's promise to bless him with a family to follow him and a land in which they could live. He was already 75 when he made that move: three-quarters of a century in the rearview mirror and starting over (Gen. 12:1-4). His wife Sarai was 65, but still considered to be beautiful. With a decent inheritance and some good investments in sheep, they had quite a retinue of family, flocks, and servants.

Abram and Sarai found Canaan to be accommodating. They enjoyed the land God had promised, but had no luck with the second part of the promise. Children were not forthcoming, though the text records several additional accounts of God's promise to that end.

As noted in last week's lesson, evidence suggests that multiple writers contributed to the narratives in Genesis – one of the reasons why God's promise to Abraham is repeated several times. The initial story of call and promise (12:1-3) is from an author known as the Yahwist (abbreviated as J). "J" is probably the oldest layer of tradition, and refers to God by the name "Yahweh." Both J and the Priestly writer (P) include restatements of the promise that Abram and Sarai will have children.

The Yahwist repeats the promise in 13:14-16, 15:1-6, and 18:1-15. The most formal of these is the story in chapter 15: as Abram expressed despair at having an heir, God "brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness" (15:4-6). The promise was followed by a formal (and spooky) covenant ceremony.

Chapter 16 relates the account of how Sarai gave up and persuaded Abram to impregnate the Egyptian maid Hagar so she could give birth as a surrogate mother. Ishmael was born, but Sarai and Hagar didn't get along after that, leading to strife and an unhappy situation.

This is followed by the Priestly version of the covenant promise to Abram (chapter 17), our text for the day. The story begins with a note that Abram had reached the age of 99 when Yahweh appeared to Abram, saying "I am God Almighty (*El Shaddai*); walk before me and be blameless" (v. 1). Patriarchal texts in which God appears as the source of life and fertility often use the title *El Shaddai*, which is typically translated as "God Almighty," though the meaning is uncertain. (See "The Hardest Question" online.)

As God (known as Yahweh) had called Abram to "go ... to the land I will show you" (12:1), now God (known as *El Shaddai*) challenges Abraham to "walk before me and be blameless" (v. 1). The word for "blameless," *tamim*, was also used to describe Noah (Gen. 6:9) and Job (1:1, 8), both stellar examples of righteous living.

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These, then, were the primary covenant requirements on Abram's part: he was to walk faithfully/blamelessly before God, who pledged to "make you exceedingly numerous" (v. 1b) and "the ancestor of a multitude of nations" (v. 4).

Abram fell on his face at the very thought of a centenarian siring a multitude, but God was serious, announcing that Abram's name would be changed to "Abraham" as a sign of the covenant (v. 5). The name is a dialectical variant of the same word, meaning something akin to "Exalted Father."^U

Further promises in vv. 6-8 reinforce the pledge that Abraham would be "exceedingly fruitful," the ancestor of nations and of kings. God's covenant would last "throughout their generations" as they lived in the land of Canaan, to be given to them "for a perpetual holding."

A cutting requirement (vv. 9-14)

The Priestly source is marked by a particular interest in cultic and ritual requirements, so it comes as no surprise that this story adds the stipulation that male circumcision would become a mark of Abraham's and his descendants' identity "throughout their generations" (vv. 9-10).

Circumcision was defined as the cutting of "the flesh of your foreskins" – the prepuce covering the end of the penis. For Abraham and his household, it was to be done immediately, as a sign of the covenant (v. 11). Then, as new boys were born into the clan, circumcision was to take place when they were eight days old (v. 12).

Note that the rule did not apply to Abraham and his descendants alone, but also to the relatives and servants who made up his extended household – 318 males, according to Gen. 14:14. One did not have to be a literal descen-

dant of Abraham to be counted among those living in covenant with God as Hebrews (vv. 13-14).

The practice of circumcision was neither new nor unique to Abraham's descendants: we know that other cultures, including the Egyptians, had practiced it long before Abraham, though not necessarily requiring it of every male. In their cultures, it may have been a mark of priesthood or some other office.^U

After Israel's settlement of the land, and particularly in the post-exilic period, circumcision was strongly emphasized as a mark of Hebrew identity. "The uncircumcised" were regarded as heathens, and any Hebrew male who wasn't circumcised was to be "be cut off from his people" for breaking the covenant (v. 14). Highlighting the covenant sign of circumcision would have been especially appealing during that period, when the Priestly writers are usually located.

Many years later, Paul cited this story when arguing that faith, rather than circumcision, was the key to living in covenant with God. Paul held that Abraham had believed the promise and had been reckoned as righteous (15:4-6) years before he was told to practice circumcision (17:9-14) – that is, long before he could be identified as a Jew. Thus, Paul insisted, those who argued that Christian males must be circumcised failed to understand the difference between faith and works.

A new generation (vv. 15-22)

As Abraham received a new name, so Sarai's name was changed to Sarah, a less archaic form of the same name, which means "Princess" (v. 15). If Abraham was to be the father of kings, it was appropriate that their mother be a princess: "I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her,"

God said, repeating the promise that nations and kings would rise from her offspring (v. 16).

Though v. 3 had Abraham falling to his face in worship, he responded to God's latter promise with a genuine "ROTFL" – Abraham "fell on his face and laughed" at the thought: "Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Can Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" (v. 17).

Finding the promise hard to believe, Abraham spoke up for Ishmael, his son by the maid Hagar: "O that Ishmael might live in your sight!" (v. 18). God, however, insisted that a son would be born to Sarah, and that his name would be Isaac – meaning "he laughs," or "may he laugh" (v. 19).

Given that both Abraham (17:17) and Sarah (18:9-15) laughed at the thought of having a child, the boy's name would be a perpetual reminder of God's faithfulness despite their skeptical laughter.

God's covenant with Abraham would pass down through his son Isaac (v. 19, 21), but Ishmael was not forgotten. God promised to make him "the father of twelve princes" and ancestor of "a great nation" (v. 20). A tribe known as the Ishmaelites would later interact with Israel, both peacefully and not. To this day, Arab Muslims trace their ancestry to Abraham through Ishmael.

We may wonder why stories of Israel's covenant with God should be of interest to modern believers, but they remind us of an important truth. God has been at work for a long time, and God desires to live in a positive relationship with humans. God calls us to follow on the right path and experience promised blessings, but we have the option of accepting the promise and being true to it – or choosing to follow our own way.

And that's no laughing matter.^{NFJ}



Senior Pastor: Azalea Baptist Church located in Norfolk, Va., is seeking a full-time senior pastor. We are a moderate, community-minded church with strong military ties whose members come from diverse backgrounds. We affiliate with the CBF, CBF of Virginia and BGAV. We affirm the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message, and support both men and women in leadership positions. We also affirm that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is at the heart of Christianity. Our approach to evangelism and outreach is to develop loving relationships and reflect Jesus Christ in our daily lives. The candidate should hold a degree from an accredited seminary, and five years pastoral experience is desired. Applications can be sent to azaleasearch@aol.com or to Pastor Search Committee, Azalea Baptist Church, 3314 E. Little Creek Rd., Norfolk, Va. 23518.

Pastor: University Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, La., is seeking a full-time pastor to lead our medium-sized, open-minded congregation. UBC is active in our community but wants to increase our outreach to young families and desires an energetic and imaginative leader with the ability to lead an established, multi-generational group. He/she will be responsible for weekly worship services, pastoral care, and coordination of staff, along with discipleship training to equip the members to better reach our community for Christ. Candidates' skills should include communication in a variety of forms (including social media) to a mix of audiences, and most importantly, the desire to grow spiritually as well as professionally. Visit ubc-br.org for more information. Submit résumés and a cover letter to the Pastor Search Committee at imagine.ubc@gmail.com. All submissions will be kept confidential.

Douglas Avilesbernal is executive minister of the Evergreen Association of American Baptist Churches based in Kent, Wash.

Don Flowers is pastor of Port Williams United Baptist Church in Port Williams, Nova Scotia, coming from Providence Baptist Church in Mount Pleasant, S.C.

Randy Hyde retires at the end of 2017 as pastor of Pulaski Heights Baptist Church in Little Rock, Ark., where he has served since 1996.

Suzii Paynter, executive coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, received the annual T.B. Maston Award for Christian Ethics Oct. 6, 2017, in Dallas. The award marking her "life of servanthood and leadership in applied Christianity" was presented by the T.B. Maston Foundation that honors the late, groundbreaking Baptist ethicist.

Joe Phelps will retire in January 2018 from the pastorate of Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Ky., where he has served for more than 20 years.

Bill Prather is pastor of First Baptist Church of Omaha, Neb., coming from American Baptist Church in Fort Collins, Colo., where he served for 10 years.

Mitch Randall is executive director of the Nashville-based Baptist Center for Ethics, coming from the pastorate of NorthHaven Church in Norman, Okla., where he served for 11 years.

Toya Richards is communications specialist for the Alliance of Baptists. A Baptist minister, she worked for daily newspapers including *Chicago Sun-Times* and *Lexington Herald-Leader* before writing for Presbyterian News Service (PCUSA).

Harry Riggs II is executive minister of the American Baptist Churches of Connecticut, coming from the pastorate of First Baptist Church of Lincoln, Neb.

Babs Baugh, family foundation honored

Hundreds of Baptists, including representatives of 43 organizations, gathered Oct. 23 in San Antonio, Texas, to honor Babs Baugh and the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation that supports many causes. The dinner event was hosted by Baptist News Global, which presented its 13th Founders Award to the foundation during a fun-filled evening.

"This room represents some organizations, institutions, churches and people that are the best kind of Baptists you will ever know," said Babs' daughter, Jackie Baugh Moore, who serves on the foundation's board along with her mother and sister, Julie Baugh Cloud.

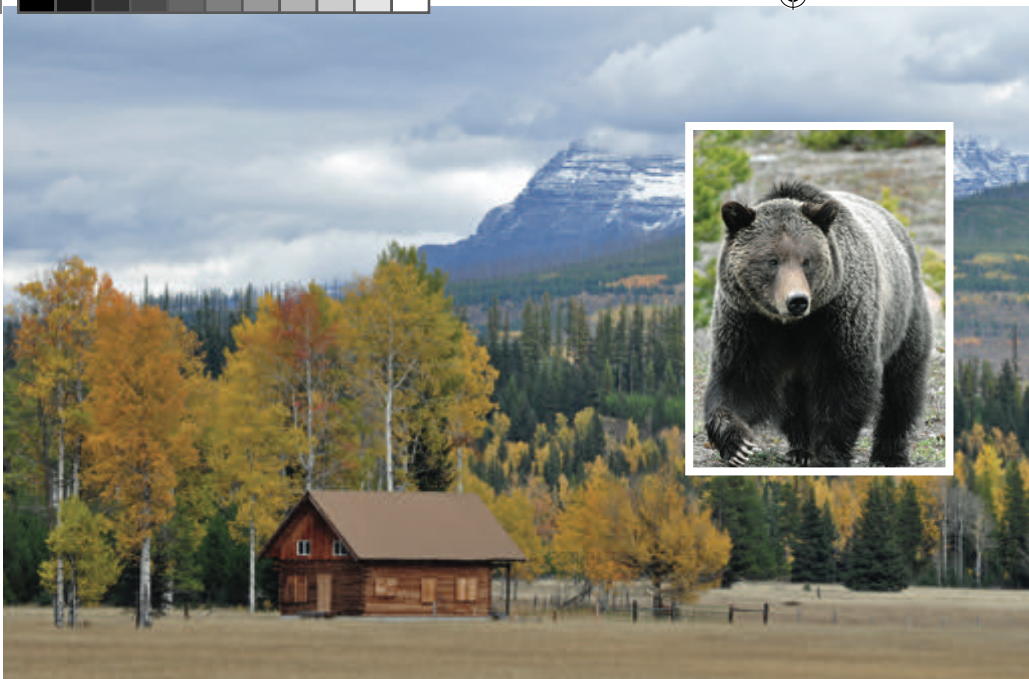
The foundation was created by a gift from Babs' late parents, Eula Mae and John Baugh, known for their strong defense of historic Baptist principles. John Baugh formed the successful Texas-based food distribution company, Sysco Corporation. **NFJ**

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Bruce Gourley is the online editor and contributing writer for Nurturing Faith, an award-winning photographer and owner of the popular web site yellowstone.net. To begin exploring any of these opportunities, contact Bruce at bgourley@nurturingfaith.net.

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BEING CHURCH IN CHANGING TIMES

A column provided in collaboration with the Center for Healthy Churches (chchurches.org)

Ending options: failure or fruit

By Tyler W. Townsend

Has your church ever had to choose between careening to a fiery end or settling into a perpetual orbit? If not your church, how about a marriage, job, project or dream?

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (better known as NASA) recently had this choice to make as the spacecraft called *Cassini* ran out of fuel. Many times we do not want to talk about endings, because we equate endings with failure instead of fruit.



But what about in John 12:20-28, where Jesus predicts the end of his ministry and introduces a metaphor of grain being planted in order to reproduce? The grain must end, must die in one sense, to multiply.

While agriculture and space odysseys are literally and figuratively “worlds apart,” the *Cassini* story can be an interesting parallel of how endings can bear fruit.

Fruit of partnerships

The gospel writer John opens the scene (v. 20) by stating there were Greeks at the worship feast. We are not told what connection the Greeks had with the events, but we see them as unexpected partners in the mission of Jesus when they asked to speak with him.

While NASA primarily sourced the *Cassini* spacecraft, the European Space Agency and the Italian Space Agency funded and built one of the most critical elements: a detaching probe that landed on Saturn’s largest moon.

Thirty years ago these groups were

unexpected partners. Often it is the inclusion of a new person or group that asks mission-relevant questions.

Fruit of teamwork

In vv. 21-22 we see a hint of bureaucracy, or possibly indecision, in the original 12 disciples. Phillip and Andrew have a team meeting of sorts before taking this atypical partner request to Jesus.

NASA had multiple teams on the *Cassini* mission. Read between the lines in this sentence from the final NASA report: “The collaboration between multiple teams with often differing objectives has become an exemplary model for future missions.”

Sounds like mature conflict resolution in a team setting is a challenge — even at NASA!

Fruit of sacrifice

In vv. 23-26 Jesus introduces a metaphor of grain falling to the ground so that it may reproduce. The initial grain of wheat dies, but central to this metaphor is the deeper understanding that the grain must be destroyed to produce additional fruit.

Early on, NASA said there is but one way to sample the atmosphere of a large planet: to enter it. *Cassini* could have stayed in orbit, ultimately becoming disoriented and powerless to generate data. Or, it could use the final reserve of fuel to initiate a one-time opportunity to enter the atmosphere, which would soon destroy it like a falling meteor.

Fruit of grief

Christ acknowledged the emotional and personal struggle regarding his anticipated death on a cross. In v. 27 he expresses “my heart is troubled.” He connects this grief

with a very natural desire to avoid a “crash and burn” ending with, “What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?”

The *Cassini* team members included an uncommon (for NASA) acknowledgement of emotions and feelings in their press release: “the end of *Cassini*’s mission is *sad*, yes, but also a time for celebration” (*italics added for emphasis*). The emotional toll of a violent and dramatic ending is not lost on Jesus, nor on the *Cassini* team, but neither avoids that reality on the way to fulfilling the mission.

Fruit of mission clarity

Jesus settled whether he should ask God for a path around a public and excruciating end: “No, it was for this very reason that I came to this hour.” He then clarifies his mission in v. 28: “Father, glorify your name!”

Similarly, the NASA team had a profound and clear mission: “The *Cassini* mission . . . is the first mission to orbit Saturn and explore its environs in detail.” A clear mission informs the journey, even when it looks like it is over.

The beauty of the seed metaphor is the transcendent reminder of transformation and multiplication.

“End of mission” choices can come to someone’s project, life, church, organization or family in many ways. It is worth noting how intentional Jesus and NASA were as they faced “end of mission” choices regarding partnerships, teamwork, sacrifice, grief and mission clarity.

What could cynically be seen as “crash and burn” failures in both stories were instead realized as productive and fruitful. **NFJ**

—Tyler W. Townsend is associate pastor of Restoration Community Church in Raleigh, N.C.



The importance of being defined by love

By Larry Hovis

Whenever I meet someone new, it usually doesn't take too long for them to ask the standard question, "So, what do you do?" I've had my current job for 13 years, but I still don't have an easy answer to that question.

But whatever answer I give, usually, immediately or eventually, it involves the word, "Baptist." And that often leads to another question, "So, what kind of Baptist are you?"

It's actually a good question because there are all kinds of Baptists. There are Baptists who protest at funerals of military personnel who paid the ultimate sacrifice. There are Baptists who boycott Disney. There are Baptists who treat women like second-class citizens.

There are Baptists who put a sign in front of their meetinghouse that says, "All are welcome," but in reality, if some persons tried to enter, they would be turned away. There are Baptists who say things such as, "God Almighty will not hear the prayer of a Jew."

So I quickly say, "I'm a different kind of Baptist from the ones you usually hear about in the news."

Although this is an oversimplification, I believe Baptists, and all religious people, fall into two general types. Some Baptists focus their attention on the holiness of God. They believe that God cannot tolerate sin, or impurity, or unholiness of any kind. Therefore, when they encounter what they understand to be unholy behavior or people, their response is to condemn it and even stamp it out if possible.

Other Baptists focus their attention on the grace, mercy and love of God. They believe that God forgives sinners and desires to reconcile all things unto God. They see in Jesus Christ God's ultimate act of love. They believe that people can best be won to God's side through expressions of love,

mercy and grace, so they relate to others on that basis.

Some Baptists lean, in varying degrees, toward the first position. Other Baptists lean, in varying degrees, toward the second position. I fall into the second camp. That's why I'm part of Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, because CBF is a community of Baptist Christians and churches who are striving to be the presence of a loving, gracious God in our communities and in our world. And there are many other Baptist groups who take the same approach, thanks be to God.

I'm always surprised to drive through the North Carolina countryside and see a sign that says, "Corinth Baptist Church." I wonder if the people at these churches ever read 1 and 2 Corinthians. Because if they did, I doubt that they would have named their church Corinth.

The church at Corinth, to which Paul wrote in these letters, was a messed-up church. Corinth was characterized by divisions (the Apollos faction vs. the Paul faction), sexual immorality (a man living with and having sexual relations with his father's wife), church members suing one another in the law courts, the rich abusing the poor when celebrating the Lord's Supper, and misusing spiritual gifts.

But in response to these misunderstandings and misapplications of the gospel, Paul provides us with some of his most memorable writings, not the least of which is 1 Corinthians 13 in which he describes the greatest gift of all: love.

Of course, Paul was simply echoing the central teaching of Jesus himself. For when Jesus was asked to name the greatest of all the commandments, he didn't hesitate:

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40).

So even though there is scriptural merit for both approaches to the Christian faith, Paul and Jesus alike make it perfectly clear that the greatest gift and the greatest commandment are all about love. All other scriptures should be interpreted in light of the greatest gift and the greatest commandment. Other scriptures should be interpreted in light of the command to love, not vice-versa.

If we must err in our interpretation and application of the scriptures, then we are on the safest ground if we err in the direction of love. Paul makes this perfectly clear in 1 Cor. 16:4, "Keep alert, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love."

These are challenging times for just about everyone, including Christians in general and Baptists in particular. We are confronted with issues that threaten to tear at the fabric of our shared fellowship and mission. We aren't going to find unanimity on all of these issues.

When we look for common ground, but still find ourselves on opposite sides of the fence, what can we do? We could take the approach of many of our Baptist forbears and go our separate ways. Or we could take the approach of Jesus and Paul and decide that it is more important to love one another than be right.

What kind of Baptist are you? I pray we will be the kind of Baptists of whom others will say, "They do everything in love." **NFJ**

—Larry Hovis is executive coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.





Good & Bad

Just how moral is the Bible?

BY E.B. SELF

Morality has to do with good and bad, with right and wrong, with what should and what should not be done. People often disagree on morality, over what is moral (what should be done) and what is immoral (what should not be done).

Is there a good way to deal with these differences? For many of us, the Bible may not clearly answer every single question but is the best guide for morality overall. But how moral is the Bible?

INSTRUCTIONS

If we think of the *amount* of moral material in the Bible, it would be challenging to determine the exact percentage of the Bible that is concerned with right and wrong. The figure would probably be large.

If we think of the *level* of morality in the Bible, the answer is not simple. There is much to admire in the Bible about morality. There are also some special concerns that may lead us to wonder about the morality included in the Bible.

If we think about *standard* moral teachings, the Bible has them. We read in the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament about honoring parents, not killing, not stealing, not committing adultery and not coveting. We also find in the words of Jesus in the New Testament that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us.

It is hard to disagree with any of these moral instructions. They represent a high level of morality.

The Bible also has some very high



moral teachings. We read from Jesus about turning the other cheek, going the second mile, forgiving “70 times seven,” loving our enemies, and not returning evil for evil but returning good for evil.

There is the example of the Good Samaritan and his special concern for an injured man. These moral standards are so high that we usually think they can be followed only by very saintly people. These teachings present an extremely high level of morality.

CONCERNS

Although the Bible does have many excellent moral teachings, there are also parts of the Bible that raise concerns about the level of morality. These parts are often overlooked or minimized.

The Israelites had a bad experience with slavery when they were captives in Egypt.

But the Hebrews themselves had slaves. Before the time in Egypt, Sarah, Abraham’s wife, had a slave girl (see Gen. 21:10).

There are special instructions about slavery in Lev. 25:44-46. The Israelites were not supposed to make slaves of fellow Israelites but could take slaves from other countries.

And then there is Paul. He probably knew about the teaching in Leviticus and may well have thought that Christians should not have other Christians as slaves. Paul did send the runaway slave Onesimus back to Philemon “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother” (Philem. 1:16).

And Paul wrote in Gal. 3:28, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Paul thought unity in Christ was



more important than social distinctions. But Paul's New Testament writings do not contain a condemnation of slavery itself. He did mention many other things that he was strongly against, so why not slavery?

The modern reaction against slavery for anyone is becoming more powerful and is so strong that biblical morality has been challenged at this point. Was slavery ever God's will for anyone? Were biblical writers going more by the cultures of their times than by the wishes of the God of love and mercy?

SEXUALITY

A second area of concern for morality and the Bible is sex. Many of us were brought up with the idea that the story of Adam and Eve expresses God's will for marriage. The idea was that there should be monogamy for life.

We do not read of any wedding ceremony for Adam and Eve, but the account involves one man and one woman. The view has developed that there should be no sexual activity before marriage or outside of marriage. Yet we read exceptions in the Bible.

Abraham, who was called by God to go to another land, did not confine his experience of fatherhood to one woman. Abraham had his son Ishmael through Hagar, his wife's handmaid, before having his son Isaac with his wife Sarah.

Jacob had some kind of divine encounter (wrestling with an angel) and later was called Israel. But he had 12 sons through two living wives and two living concubines.

David, said to be a man after God's own heart, became involved with another man's wife. David also allowed himself more than one wife at the same time. Solomon, who had asked God for wisdom and received it, had many wives.

It is not surprising that people do not always live up to moral standards, but these men all had a special relationship with God. It is troubling that the behavior of these great men of the Bible was not consistent with teachings in other parts of the Bible.

Are we to overlook or minimize their failings? Do their accomplishments far outweigh their shortcomings? Are their examples a warning about the tendency

toward moral failure for all of us? Some of the men of the Bible were mixed models at best — good in some ways and bad in others.

TAKING LIFE

Another difficult area of morality for the Bible is slaughter. The word seems harsh in relation to the Bible because it can refer to the killing of vast numbers of people.

We prefer to think of the high moral teachings of the Bible. But the Bible does cover mass killings and often assigns responsibility to God through direct action or command.

The Bible clearly claims God's involvement in the drowning of masses in the flood during Noah's time, the deaths of the first-born in Egypt when Moses was leading the Israelites to freedom, and the destruction of Egyptian soldiers in the Red Sea when the Israelites escaped.

Great numbers of people were killed when Joshua thought that he was obeying God by leading the Israelites into the land of Canaan. Samuel thought that God commanded the annihilation of the Amalekites when Saul was king.

There are explanations for these events. The whole world was said to be desperately evil during the time of Noah. The Egyptians made slaves of the Israelites and treated them harshly. The Canaanites in general worshipped idols. The Amalekites were not hospitable to the Israelites when the Israelites first entered the Promised Land.

But the reported loss of life is often staggering, and the explanations are not always completely convincing. It is perplexing and somewhat difficult to believe these claims when we read the commandment, supposedly given by God himself, not to kill.

There are also the high teachings of loving your enemy and returning good for evil. Surely the God who knows all was aware of such moral ideas. Could there have been more imaginative, more creative and (strange to say) more humane solutions to difficult situations in these biblical stories?

There are many people who sincerely believe that God may say and do anything that God wishes, even if the results are horrible. There is the idea that anything

done by God is good or at least that God has a good reason for whatever is done.

But it still confuses and bothers some of us that biblical writers attribute mass killings, slaughter, to God. Biblical stories involving violence by God do not seem to be consistent with high moral ideals in other parts of the Bible.

SALVATION

A somewhat surprising area of difficulty for morality and the Bible is salvation. The message from the Bible is that salvation (forgiveness of sins, admission to heaven) is based on God's grace expressed in the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

An innocent person received the punishment that guilty sinners deserved. Recipients of salvation may feel profoundly grateful for the gift offered to them, but when has punishing the innocent in place of the guilty ever been considered moral?

We sometimes hear even from people in law enforcement that it is much better to let many guilty persons go free than to punish one person who is innocent. Letting the guilty go unpunished does not sound moral, but punishing the innocent sounds morally worse.

We apparently believe that religious considerations are much more important than moral principles when it comes to salvation. It is just startling to realize that religion and morality do not always coincide.

When we think carefully about how moral the Bible is, we do not find a single, simple biblical morality. We find different kinds of morality or perhaps levels of morality.

We can be properly guided by the high level of standard moral teachings in the Bible. We can be inspired by the extremely high level of exalted moral ideals. And we can see by a consideration of the areas of slavery, sex, slaughter and salvation that morality in the Bible is more complicated than we sometimes think. **NFJ**

—E.B. (Ben) Self of Hopkinsville, Ky.,
is author of *Ways of Thinking About God: The Bible, Philosophy, and Science*
(Nurturing Faith Publishing).

Getting down to business

A conversation with Nathan Edwards about administration as ministry

GADSDEN, Ala. — Nathan Edwards is the founder and managing member of Missional Business Services (mbservicesllc.net), a provider of short-term and long-term administrative services to churches and other organizations, of any size, with a mission focus.

Editor John Pierce explored the topic of administration as ministry with Nathan, who also serves as minister of music at First Baptist Church of Gadsden, Ala.

NFJ: It is obvious by the name of your company that you believe church administration is also ministry. How so?

NE: In 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul identifies those whom God has appointed for work in the church. We find those with the gift of administration among that list.

Proper administration allows matters of the church to be “done decently and in order,” as prescribed later in 1 Cor. 14:40. While this passage speaks most directly to proper worship preparation, it certainly has application to the practical side of the congregations we serve.

Administration is often behind-the-scenes, less-visible, less-glamorous work. And yet, this work is vital to effective church ministry, pastoral and lay leadership, and practical church function.

Active churches don't just DO good ministry. They PLAN to do good ministry. And they implement proper procedures, processes, controls, policies and other safeguards to ensure that well-intended, inspired ministry ideas can be effectively carried out.

Churches are both sacred and temporal organizations. They are legal entities about the Lord's business. Churches are subject to laws, regulations, best practices and other external guidelines.

Churches that fail to adequately acknowledge these parameters may find themselves as the subject of an unfavorable

newspaper headline. Proper administration underscores the church's testimony and strengthens the church's witness to its community.

While administration is part of the overall ministry of the church to its members and its community, it is also a ministry to the ministers. Pastors and pastoral ministers need their full capacity to focus on the ministry needs of the church. Proper administration equips the pastoral staff in practical ways to allow them to most effectively perform the tasks to which they are called.

NFJ: What have you discovered in congregations that led to the services you now provide?

NE: Unfortunately, countless examples of poor administration and energy-strapped ministers led to this concept. Apathy, poor oversight, financial waste, and even embezzlement, fraud, sexual misconduct, and the like exist at alarming rates within the very organizations that should set the standards for proper behavior and protocol.

Churches may operate without policies — financial or otherwise: Finance committees aren't trained to read or understand basic financial statements. Administrators don't know how to reconcile bank statements. Budgets are nonexistent or ignored. Staff (and even members) can spend church resources without approval or review. Significant contracts aren't negotiated. Facilities and equipment aren't maintained. The list of examples goes on and on.

And, oftentimes, ministerial staff members are asked to put aside their primary responsibilities to manage these administrative issues, for which they have neither the

training nor the calling. The results are often overlooked or under-addressed needs and burned-out ministers. If we are going to be good stewards of the resources God and church members entrust to us, then we must pay attention to these things.

Our current culture and environment present three, compounding challenges to proper church administration:

First, churches often feel a sense of exemption or protection from laws, regulations, inspection and best practices. Similarly, churches often believe that anyone conducting business with them is acting in the church's best interest rather than their own.

Churches also operate with a higher sense of loyalty to people and vendors than nearly any other entity. Churches must remove any sense of false entitlement, exemption, or protection and minimize any barriers that prevent them from being the best possible stewards of God's entrusted resources.

Second, we live in an increasingly litigious climate. Anyone can be sued anytime for anything. People are less hesitant to name a church as an offending party in any number of allegations. Banks are less hesitant to pursue legal remedies when churches can't pay their mortgages.

As a result, laws and regulations around churches are becoming more complex. Compliance with these changing laws and regulations requires more time and more specialized skill from staff and committees. This means a greater commitment of time and money.

Third, in many churches, resources are more limited. Members give faithfully, but our current economy means that things just cost more money. Giving trends don't necessarily rise with the cost of inflation.

Contributors want to directly support experiences, projects and events rather than brick, mortar and administration. Unfortunately, there is still a cost to keep the lights on.





*‘Proper administration underscores the church’s testimony
and strengthens the church’s witness to its community.’*

The truth is that many churches practice inadequate administration for the reasons described above, and others. Churches must pay more attention to their financial and administrative needs, but with fewer resources.

Missional Business Services was founded to provide churches with qualified support on a broad range of needs and to create capacity for pastoral staff to focus on the ministry needs of their congregations and communities at a lower cost than reasonable alternatives.

NFJ: What is the one administrative matter to which most churches need to give more careful attention?

NE: Most churches need to give more careful attention to their basic financial statements. Financial statements provide critical information necessary to make sound ministry and operational decisions.

A set of basic financial statements for a church should include a Balance Sheet, or Statement of Financial Position, and an Income Statement, or Statement of Activities. And, these statements should reflect financial results of all activities of the church, including church ministries, day care operations, music school activities, land leases, etc.

You can segregate different groups of activities within the financial statements, but it is important that church leaders see, understand and discuss all areas of their church’s finances.

A Balance Sheet is a document that shows the financial position, or “balance,” of all assets, liabilities, designated/restricted funds, debts and net assets at a specific point in time. Balance sheets should include all cash and investment accounts. (And, those accounts should be reconciled and reviewed each month.)

Balance sheets should also include any significant liabilities, such as payroll tax liabilities, if applicable, along with a list of designated funds and any debt obligations. Some churches may supplement the balance

sheet with a Statement of Designated Fund Activities, showing the inflows and outflows from each designated fund.

Churches (and for-profit organizations, too) often give sole attention to the income statement. But, balance sheets are critically important to understanding and communicating the full financial picture of any organization, including churches.

The Income Statement is a document that shows the financial activities, or net transaction amounts, of all revenues and expenses over a period of time. Income statements should include all sources of income and all areas of expenses.

Income statements should be detailed to line-item descriptions, and line items should be categorized and subtotaled by like-kind, so that the reader of the income statement can clearly understand from where money comes, and to where money goes.

Income statements should compare results to both a budgeted expectation and a prior period’s actual results. This will provide the reader with some context to better understand the current information.

Financial statements must be complete, accurate and timely in order to help church leaders be well informed and make sound decisions. Financial statements should be provided monthly or quarterly, depending on the church’s formalized expectations. And, financial statements should be reviewed in detail by the appropriate church staff and committee(s).

Staff and committees responsible for financial matters should do three things when reviewing financial statements:

- Ensure they have a complete set of financial statements that reflect all of the financial aspects of the church for the period under review.
- Understand the purpose and content of each financial statement provided.
- Ask appropriate, clarifying questions until they are satisfied with the response and the concern has been resolved.

Financial statements provide critical information necessary to make sound ministry and operational decisions. It is worth the time and effort to understand these statements so that you can make the best decisions possible for the good of the congregation and your overall ministry.

NFJ: What’s happened to the offering plate in recent years, and what creativity do church leaders need to advance financial stewardship?

NE: Recent studies suggest that church giving is consistent with, or even slightly behind, economic inflation, and is trailing other areas of charitable giving by a significant margin. Obviously, this is not a good report for church leaders. However, I think there are some ways churches can address this challenge, and work toward better financial footing.

First, churches need to better communicate reasons to give. This can often start through the church’s budget (which every church should have).

Let’s face it: When people hear the word “budget,” eyes usually roll, heads fall, and energy is almost instantly sucked out of the room. Yet, the church’s budget may be the only document by which a church formally proclaims its ministry priorities. A properly crafted budget should elicit a sense of confidence in what the church is trying to accomplish each year.

Churches should celebrate their budgets as strong statements of faith and mission for the coming year. Churches should involve as many in their congregations as are willing to participate.





The process should identify those ministries and activities that are important to the mission of the church — and Church.

Financial investments should be assigned to those areas, not because it's what was spent last year, but because it's what the people commit to investing in the Kingdom's work through their congregation. Churches should create the budget, celebrate the budget and commit to fund the budget. Then, churches should return to the budget throughout the year to highlight the ministry priorities to which they committed.

Once churches communicate the reasons to give, churches should ask people to give. Countless studies have shown that the number one reason people don't give is because they're not asked to do so.

Churches are very good at talking about ministries, budgets, plans, etc. And, they are very good at saying that those ministries, budgets, plans, etc. need funding. Where they often stop short is in directly asking their congregations to fund those ministries — gently, politely, but unapologetically.

This should happen with appropriate regularity throughout the year and should come from lay leaders as well as staff members. And, generosity should be affirmed. Congregations need to know that their gifts, regardless of size, are appreciated and vital to the church's mission.

After the church has communicated reasons to give and directly asked them to give, they need to have convenient ways for people to give. The offering plate is no longer the sole or even primary venue for giving in churches.

Congregations have progressed from passing the hat, to offering plates, to mailed envelopes, to online giving, to giving kiosks, to giving via text message. It really is phenomenal to consider the changes we've seen in technology in the last 10, even five years.

Some churches have adapted well to the changes in the ways people contribute, and other churches probably need to consider some of these newer methods of giving. The important thing is to make it as easy as possible for members to contribute.

NFJ: What is the first question church leaders tend to ask you?

NE: Ironically, a question we often get asked from church leaders early into our work with them is, "What's going on?" That question is asked with varying degrees of frustration and urgency.

Often, we are invited into the congregation at a transition point in administrative leadership for one reason or another. Church leaders can sometimes feel overwhelmed by both the intricacies and the significance of financial and administrative matters. They are usually just trying to get their arms around what kind of shape the administrative affairs are in and what they're up against.

The early stages of relationship with most churches can be some of our most fulfilling work.

We calm initial fears, address existing concerns, establish a fresh starting point, and begin moving forward in confident and cooperative steps toward a stronger administrative foundation. **NFJ**

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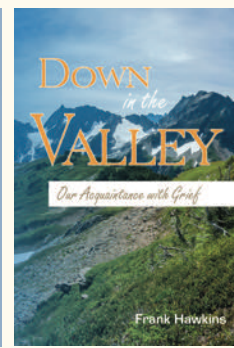
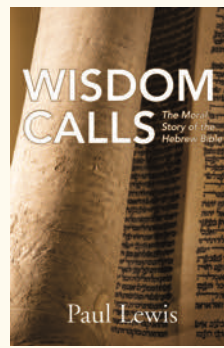
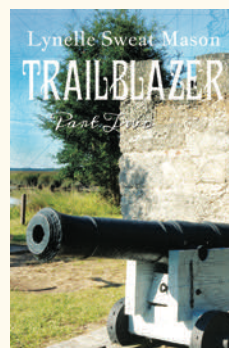
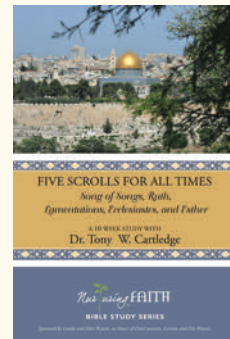
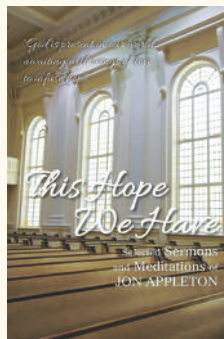
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Finding redemption, restoration after a bad experience

BY RICK JORDAN

According to a recent poll, many young adults are leaving the church. As Pew Research Center notes, “As the Millennial generation enters adulthood, its members display much lower levels of religious affiliation, including less connection with Christian churches, than older generations.”

More specifically, “fully 36 percent of young Millennials (ages 18 and 24) are religiously unaffiliated, as are 34 percent of older Millennials (ages 25-33).”

The poll also found that more than 85 percent of American adults were raised Christian, but nearly one-fourth of those no longer identify with Christianity.

ONE EXPERIENCE

Following high school graduation, Katie Gambill, 19, volunteered to serve at a Christian orphanage in Uganda for a year. “I didn’t consider that their beliefs might be different from mine.”

Katie was shocked that the leaders were unethical and judgmental. They accepted volunteers’ \$500 per month for expenses, then fired the volunteers without offering refunds. They listened in on Katie’s phone conversations and followed her at night because they did not trust her.

“It was so messed up,” she said. “I decided, ‘If this is what Christianity is, I want no part of it.’”

Katie, 19, returned to the U.S. burned out on religion. Yet, she decided to give

Christianity one more shot by attending “Sessions” — a week of ministry and spiritual introspection for college students held during the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship’s annual general assembly and led by experienced campus minister Wanda Kidd.

“Sessions allows students to make friends with like-minded young adults,” said Wanda. “They also are asked to serve in many ways throughout the week.”

The students provide practical help such as making lunches for the children’s assembly and assisting with the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty and New Baptist Covenant luncheons. Also, they participate in breakout sessions and worship events.”

Wanda had heard about Katie’s difficult missions experience and urged her attendance.

“Wanda makes Sessions a safe place,” Katie said. “It is obvious that she loves young adults so much. She genuinely cares. And, it helps that she’s also crazy.”

REDEMPTION

“Sessions was the most reassuring experience ever,” Katie added. “Everyone there was so positive and open. I could relax and tell the truth. Most people don’t care to hear about a bad missions experience, but here was a community where I could say, ‘That was the worst experience of my life!’”

She told of the condemnation she had received overseas in such an unhealthy environment where she simply wanted to serve children in need.

“An orphanage should be a place of ‘good news,’” Katie reflected. But she saw no good news coming through the

Christian orphanage experience. The experience led her to wonder if Christianity really was based on good news.

“For so long, besides my own family members, so few seemed to teach that God really does love all persons and does not want people to feel trapped or put down,” she said.

Later in the summer, Katie also attended “SelahVie” — a week of debriefing for CBF interns who serve, for the most part, in local churches during the summer. Katie found this community of young adults to be supportive and redemptive.

“There were 20 girls in my cabin and we became like sisters to one another, open to talk about anything,” she recalled. “I discovered that other people had imperfect ministry experiences too; I was not alone.”

Katie’s faith was renewed last summer as she met a spiritual mentor and found a Christian community of young adults.

So, what would Katie say to someone else who is struggling with his or her own faith due to bad experiences? Here are her words of encouragement:

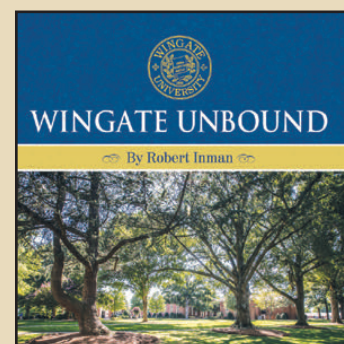
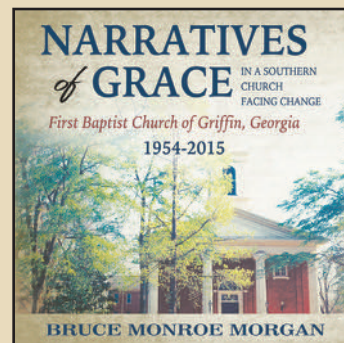
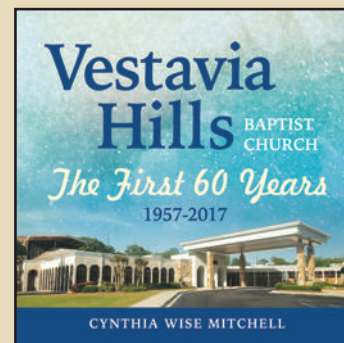
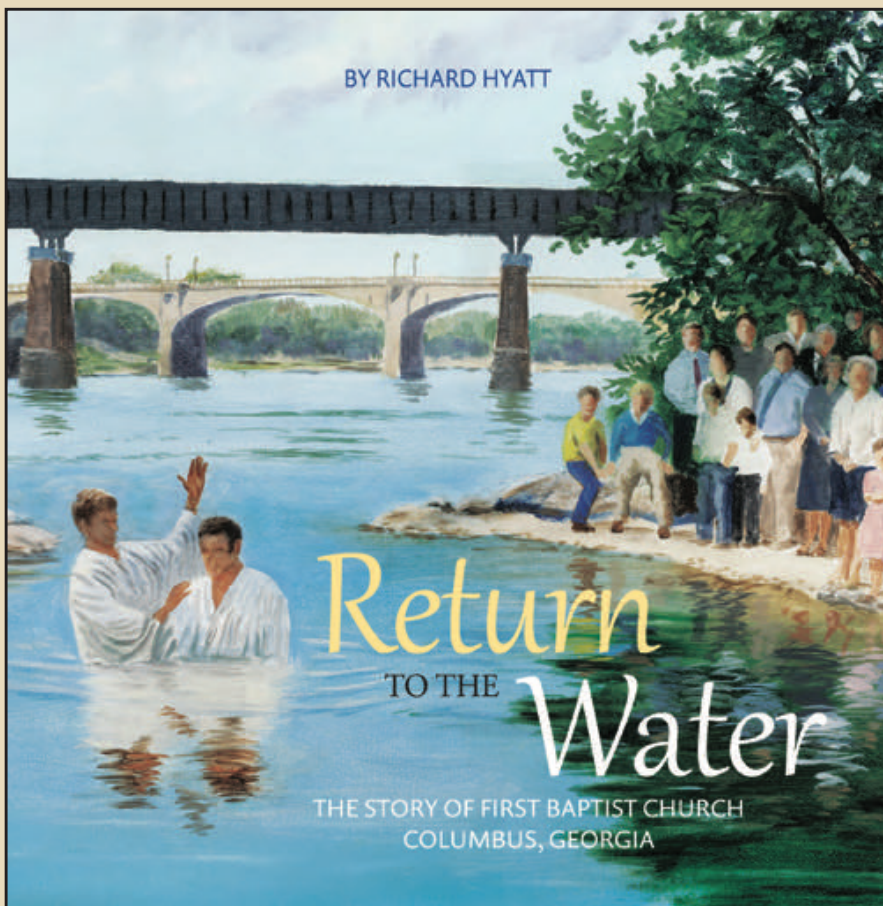
“I completely understand why you want to give up on it, because some Christians have given you plenty of reasons to give up. But there are people out there who love everybody, who do not cram their faith down people’s throats or condemn people to hell who believe a bit differently. I have found people who love Jesus, and I am not scared of God because God is not a scary person. God may be disappointed in choices you make, but God loves you so much with a love that is unending and unending.”

Such is the sustaining faith of a young adult. **NFJ**

—Rick Jordan is church resources coordinator for the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina.



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—Dr. William L. Hardee, Pastor
First Baptist Church, Griffin, Ga.

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The continuing self-destruction of American Christianity

BY RON PERRITT

Recently a friend of mine died, a victim of an autoimmune disease. The cells that should have helped him stay strong and productive began to attack the healthy tissue, ultimately leading to his death.

This seems to be a frightening analogy for what is happening in much of Christianity today in the United States. Those who claim to be Christians vilify those who understand God or the Bible differently, resist helping the destitute in our world, oppose or are indifferent to social justice, and make pronouncements about events as though they know God's mind even better than God.

In the not-so-distant past, "Christian" people were often responsible for the torture and death of any who opposed their creeds and doctrines, even in America. What justifies this attitude of religious superiority and gives them the right to call themselves Christians without regard to what Jesus taught about being a follower? There are no doubt many contributing factors, but two are historically significant.

First, the concept of faith as "trust in Jesus," used by Jesus and Paul, was soon replaced by the idea of faith as profession of belief in some set of propositional statements *about* Jesus.

Read the Nicene Creed, or the

Apostles' Creed, or other statements of faith found in many churches today. They tend to define faith as belief in, or assent to, some doctrines and ideas *about* Jesus.

The word "faith" almost has become synonymous with "belief." We often talk about the Baptist faith or the Methodist faith, or the Catholic faith, meaning that each group has its own unique set of doctrinal beliefs.

Professing belief in creeds or doctrines has been used historically to identify a person as a "Christian" by the church. Such beliefs are not necessarily bad by themselves, but they often have become a substitute for doing what Jesus said was necessary to be his follower.

Second, since 1100 C.E. the most important doctrine for most of Christianity has been Penal Substitutionary Atonement, that Jesus died in my place to pay the penalty of sin that God required for our forgiveness. In too many churches if someone *professed* agreement with this doctrine, that person was "saved" and called a Christian—and safe from hell.

An individual could be a "Christian" and still own slaves, oppose social justice, denigrate ethnically different people, and feel no need to love those less fortunate people in the community. Not long ago, Christians could have harassed, tortured and even murdered people who refused to profess this idea, and done so often with the

blessings of their church's leadership.

If believing in this doctrine helps one become a better follower of Jesus, well and good, but it must never become a license to ignore or oppose what Jesus taught was necessary to be his follower.

Jesus spent time teaching his followers by word and deed so they would understand and adopt his revelation of God and how to do God's will, to love God and their neighbor, to do to their neighbor what they would like done to them.

Early on, to be a follower of Jesus meant to adopt his revealing of God, what God required, and to do God's will as demonstrated by Jesus himself. Thus the early followers who trusted Jesus were called "people of the way," namely Jesus' way.

Jesus *never* said to his followers, "You have permission to establish other criteria for being a follower of mine." In fact, Jesus criticized religious leaders of his day for using their beliefs as a substitute for loving God and neighbor.

It was not that obeying the law was bad, but for Jesus, it could never be a substitute for doing what he taught.

Much of church history has been characterized by different groups claiming the authority to define Christianity in a way that bypasses what Jesus taught, and thus have made it easy to subvert his message.

This is arrogant in the extreme, and has resulted in a steady self-destruction of the meaning of the Christianity that Jesus founded, along with the image of what it means to be a follower of Jesus. **NFJ**

—Ron Perritt taught at Georgia Tech and Louisiana State University, where he received his Ph.D. in electrical engineering. He also received a graduate degree from Emory University's Candler School of Theology. He is a member of University Baptist Church in Baton Rouge, La., and serves on the Nurturing Faith Board of Directors.

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Wasted days and wasted nights

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

Jesus' life and teachings didn't matter very much.

At least that's the idea one gets from those American Christians who see his only earthly purpose in coming to die as a penalty for human sinfulness — and then rocketing off to heaven to fix up some cushy mansions for our afterlife while awaiting our arrival.

Lately, as part of the developing Jesus Worldview Initiative (jesusworldview.org) that seeks to counter so-called “biblical” and “Christian” worldviews that tend to ignore Jesus, I have set my default on asking the same question Mary, the mother of Jesus, asked when her young son stayed behind at the temple in Jerusalem: “Where's Jesus?”

If one pays attention and keeps that question in the forefront, it can be striking to see how little Jesus shows up when Christianity gets politicized such as at the Values Voter Summit. And there's a lot of talk each year about keeping Christ in Christmas — just not much concern for keeping Christ in Christianity.

One of many examples comes from the Billy Graham Evangelism Association (BGEA). In my search for Jesus online, I found this troubling response to the question of “Where's Jesus?”

“Jesus Christ came down from heaven for one reason: to do God's will by giving His life as the final sacrifice for our sins. Once that was accomplished, His main work was done.”

Really? That's it?

All those wasted days and nights, roaming Galilee mumbling meaningless stuff about the Kingdom of God, facing temptations that have no relevance to us, and sparring with the religious elites.



This depiction of Jesus teaching his disciples hangs above the main entrance to the Church of the Beatitudes on the Sea of Galilee near Capernaum in Israel. Photo by John D. Pierce.

Just killing time, waiting to be killed, I guess.

That's the only logical conclusion if his “one reason” (as the Graham group affirms) for coming to earth was to be “the final sacrifice.”

Of course, that perspective makes it easy to have a Franklin Graham kind of Christianity of ignorance and exclusion. If the life and teachings of Jesus are irrelevant, it's easy to justify all kinds of ugliness in the name of Christ.

Apparently, the way God was revealed through the earthly ministry of Jesus was just a stall tactic to get to the cross. Never mind its applicability for how we should live.

Sadly, many of our friends and fellow church members have embraced this understanding of the Christian faith that allows for ignoring the hard stuff that Jesus showed and said over three remarkable years about the Kingdom of God.

With a ticket to heaven in hand —

thanks to the “one reason” Jesus came to earth — many modern Christians feel free to embrace all kinds of attitudes and actions that Jesus never owned and to brand those self-serving perspectives as “biblical” or “Christian.”

But then again, those were just Jesus' wasted days and wasted nights — telling vague stories, embracing no-good-doers, liberating the guilty, lifting up the poor, erasing lines of discrimination, condemning self-righteous religious legalists, healing the sick, saving and redirecting the lost, widening understandings of grace, embracing the outcasts and, in doing so, revealing the very face of God.

We have work to do! And it starts by asking again and again, “But ... where's Jesus?”

If, to us, he was simply a pawn in a scripted sacrificial play, then we are not likely to find him — or to find his way costly but compelling. **NFJ**

We have work to do! And it starts by asking again and again, “But ... where's Jesus?”

Why do Christians post **THE TEN COMMANDMENTS** more than Jesus' greatest ones?

BY BRUCE GOURLEY

Amid the many marvels of our modern age is the transition of print media into digital formats. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter are collectively the primary information medium of hundreds of millions of people.

Short-form digital communication dominates today's publishing market to such an extent that various studies indicate that our attention span, in terms of reading, is becoming ever shorter.

SHORT TERM

Social media exploits a basic feature of the human brain that we call short-term memory. Extensively studied for more than a century, short-term memory generally lasts for 15 to 30 seconds and has a capacity to remember about seven items.

Unless a given bit of information (a thought, Facebook post, a sentence in a book) is inherently and exceptionally memorable (a clever phrase, campaign slogan, funny line from a movie), one must make some kind of intentional effort (memorization techniques, repetition, visualization) to move short-term memory into long-term memory.

While the limitations of short-term memory may be more evident today than ever, our innate inability to remember the vast majority of what we hear and read is nothing new.

Take the Bible, for example. In the English world, the term "Ten Commandments" has historically been more popular than the term "Old Testament" in regards to references in books and, in more recent



decades, on the Internet. Today, the Ten Commandments are referenced approximately six times as often in books as is the Old Testament. (Google provides the book data through a service known as Ngram Viewer.) In short, the Ten Commandments have become the tidbit from the Old Testament that most people remember.

EMBEDDED

This relatively short list of commandments uses repetition (seven of the ten begin with the phrase "Thou shalt not ..." in the KJV) and is accompanied by a visualization of Moses on a mountain, factors that aid long-term memory. So, while we may not be able to recite all 10, we easily remember there are 10, and we likely can verbalize six or seven of them.

What we don't tend to remember, however, is that the Ten Commandments are embedded within a much larger grouping of Old Testament laws. Jewish scholars count a total of 613 commandments, many of which are a part of the same units of scripture in Exodus and Deuteronomy

that contain differing accounts of the Ten Commandments.

In other words, we remember 10 particular Old Testament commandments out of hundreds, and have no clue about most of the 603 additional commandments.

In addition, historically and up to the most recent data available, English book references to the "Ten Commandments" are greater than references not only to "Old Testament," but also to "New Testament" and "Jesus."

MOST POPULAR

A reasonable interpretation of the popularity of the Ten Commandments above Jesus in published books is that the Ten Commandments are more representative of public Christian faith than Jesus' teachings.

According to Google search data from 2004 to the present, searches for "Ten Commandments" and "10 Commandments" combined far outnumber searches for "Old Testament." At the same time, searches for combined variations of "love neighbor" (a reference to Jesus' greatest

commandments in Matthew 22) along with searches for “beatitudes” (arguably Jesus’ most prominent biblical teachings) are but a small fraction of searches for either Ten Commandments or Old Testament.

Furthermore, definitions of “biblical worldview” by George Barna and other white evangelical Christians often include at least portions of the Ten Commandments. Many directly refer to the Ten Commandments as summarizing a “biblical worldview.” Yet most rarely mention the name of Jesus (the central figure of the Christian Bible) or the word “love” (the central theme of Jesus’ life and teachings).

An absence of Jesus and his teachings is also apparent in the thousands of public displays (overwhelmingly initiated by professing Christians) of the Old Testament’s Ten Commandments across America, compared to virtually no public displays of Jesus’ beatitudes or what he deemed the “greatest” commandments:

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt. 22:37-40).

SATURATION

The Flathead Valley in northwest Montana is one of the most Ten Commandment-saturated places in America. It is also home to white supremacist Richard Spencer, known nationally for headlining white nationalist rallies around the country.

Spencer considers himself a “cultural Christian” who is fighting for the return of “Christian values” to America. Yet not surprisingly, Jesus and his teachings are absent from Spencer’s vocabulary. Instead, Spencer’s racist and hateful rhetoric conjures up exclusive religious nationalism embodied in an authoritarian God tied to the Old Testament.

Philip Klevmoen, a rancher in the Flathead Valley and one of America’s most vocal proponents of public displays of the Ten Commandments, does talk about Jesus, albeit in an odd way. He has produced and displayed hundreds of Ten Commandments

signs in Montana and beyond, and actively offers to “help the first 25 churches in each state in the United States to establish God’s Word in a visual manner” by providing Ten Commandments signs in their communities.

On his website Gods10.com Klevmoen never talks about Jesus’ actual teachings. And Jesus’ “Greatest Commandments” are conspicuously absent.

“Our goal, as Christians,” he writes on his website, “is to increase our knowledge of God.”

Belief in proper doctrine is the key. Loyalty to the Ten Commandments is front and center. Following Jesus is not part of the equation.

PUZZLEMENT

It was here in the Flathead Valley amid white Christian fears and hatred of Muslims that I spent a weekend last fall, leading seminars on “Understanding Islam” hosted by a local church.

Tensions ran high in the packed church fellowship hall, the room full of white faces and one lone Muslim. Most attendees were not members of the church. The hostility toward Islam was evident. At times the conversation became heated.

Amid the discourse, one off-the-cuff comment really stuck with me. A vocal participant expressed his fidelity to the Ten Commandments and hatred of Muslims, whom he insisted were intent on conquering a “Christian” America. I noted that the Quran has roots in the Old Testament and includes its own equivalent of the Ten Commandments.

At one point the man, in the midst of making yet another anti-Muslim comment, paused and, in a moment of honest puzzlement, said that he did not understand what I meant by referring to Jesus’ “Greatest Commandments” as central to the Christian faith.

That one simple comment distilled what reams of data are telling us.

MISSING JESUS


Front and center in the history of white American Christianity is theocracy, genocide, enslavement, terrorism, domination and discrimination against various

minority people groups, always in the name of an authoritarian, oppressive Old Testament-rendered God.

For far too many who claim the Christian name, while rushing down a seemingly never-ending path of hatred and discrimination in a quest to shore up social, cultural and political power for privileged white Americanized Christianity, Jesus’ commandments and example of inclusion, love, mercy and compassion have faded from memory.

Is it possible for Jesus — the fullest revelation of God, the one professed as Savior and Lord — to gain the fuller focus of American Christians who seem to look elsewhere for more comfortable, controllable truth? Is it possible to advance a Jesus worldview within and without our churches — so that following Jesus becomes the highest priority above all other allegiances?

We believe it is worth the effort to resurrect Jesus within Christianity. That is the goal of the emerging Jesus Worldview Initiative, guided by Nurturing Faith in collaboration with those who share this concern. Learn more and get engaged at jesusworldview.org. **NFJ**



JESUS
WORLDVIEW INITIATIVE

Nurturing Faith is exploring new creative and collaborative ways to advance a Jesus worldview. To keep up with how this is taking shape — and to be a part of it — visit jesusworldview.org and/or contact Bruce Gourley, coordinator of the Jesus Worldview Initiative, at bgourley@nurturingfaith.net.



Above: Racing trucks, built for speed rather than cargo, navigate the half-mile Martinsville Speedway, known as “the Paperclip” for its long straightaways and tight turns. **Right:** Chaplain David Daly prays with Johnny Sauter, the 2016 Camping World Truck Series champion, before a race at Martinsville, Va., last fall.

Rev it up

Racing chaplain brings a pastoral presence to the pits

**STORY AND PHOTOS
BY TONY W. CARTLEDGE**

MARTINSVILLE, Va. — David Daly is a “Rev.” who spends most days with people who love to “rev it up” in NASCAR’s Camping World Truck Series and its second-tier Xfinity stock car circuit.

Daly began his ministerial career as a pastor before shifting to a staff position after joining the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) as first a local leader in the Hickory, N.C., area and then as director of a national baseball program.

SHIFTING GEARS

Daly shifted gears again in 2017. After serving for a while in a volunteer capacity, he was hired as corporate chaplain for GMS Racing, though still through the auspices of FCA.

In 2017 GMS Racing competed with three Chevy trucks in the Camping World

Series (No. 21 driven by Johnny Sauter, No. 24 by Justin Haley and No. 33 by Kaz Grala) and one car in the Xfinity series, driven by Spencer Gallagher. GMS also builds and supports Stuart Friesen’s No. 52 truck.

Though corporate offices are in Las Vegas, GMS Racing occupies a string of large shops adjacent to the runway of a small airport near Statesville, N.C. NASCAR trucks have little in common with their namesakes since none of them are designed to carry anything but speed and a driver.

GMS crews build each truck from the ground up, from the chassis and suspension to the sheet metal fabricated to demanding specifications. Engines are provided under contract with Hendrick Motorsports, which sends an engine tuner for each truck on race day.

PASTORAL

Daly, who also serves as pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Hickory, often arrives at the racing shop by 6:30 a.m. on weekdays. He drinks coffee and builds relationships

with the company’s 106 employees, few of whom have any regular church involvement.

Daly participates in staff meetings and offers voluntary Bible study sessions, but spends most of his time getting to know team members and providing the same pastoral care that he does for church members.

He visits family members in the hospital, attends funerals, and offers a caring ear to employees facing various levels of stress or difficulty in their personal lives.

RACE DAYS

Truck races are held at tracks across the country, and Daly travels to many of them, usually joining the traveling crew on a chartered plane, or driving to closer tracks such as Charlotte and Martinsville.

Saturday night races can mean a late arrival back in Hickory: it’s not unusual for Daly to get home at 1 or 2 a.m. — with a 7:30 a.m. staff meeting ahead and a Sunday morning sermon to deliver.

Race days begin before dawn, as crew chiefs, truck chiefs, engineers, engine tuners and mechanics ready trucks for the race and roll them through a rigorous inspection.

Teams typically push the limits in search of an aerodynamic advantage: when NASCAR's inspectors deem a side skirt too close to the ground, a team member brings out heavy snips and trims it to specs.

Daly is there with the crew, moving from pit to pit in the early light, bantering with team members, asking about their families, and offering constant encouragement. Sometimes he lends a hand as the truck is pushed through the various inspection stations and ultimately onto pit road.

Team members show obvious appreciation for Daly's presence and his care.

THE PITS

Drivers arrive in time to take the vehicles through qualifying — shimmying out of their jeans and into protective fire suits behind tall toolboxes in the pits.

Teams work out of assigned pit stalls as they prepare the trucks for the three rounds of qualifying that determine the starting order, then crew chiefs choose which pit they want for the race, with the top qualifiers getting first pick. The most attractive pits are near the end of the row, or have an open space ahead or behind, making entry and exit easier.

Once pit stalls are chosen, the pit crews that service the trucks during the race arrive. They are a breed unto themselves: professional athletes who train constantly for the job, capable of changing four tires and adding two cans of gas in 15 seconds or less.

GMS contracts with pit crews that work mainly for Ganassi Racing's top tier "Monster Energy Cup" cars. Daly makes a point of touching base with each of them, too, fist-bumping and wishing them well.

Pit crew responsibilities include setting up the huge pit box, complete with two levels of seating on top and banks of computer monitors both above and below. The computers allow crew chiefs and engineers to monitor the performance of each truck's engine and compare lap times with competitors.

START TO FINISH

After qualifying, trucks are lined up on pit road in their starting order, but can't have any more work done other than adjusting tire pressure. Teams "hurry up and wait" while other activities take the stage, such as practice for the Monster Cup cars and pre-race ceremonies in front of the grandstands.

Once drivers are introduced — from the back of the field to the front — Daly hops across the pit wall and onto pit road, where he greets each GMS driver, prays with them, and offers words of encouragement before they climb into their cars, put on their helmets, and buckle up in seats custom fitted for their frame.

Daly tells each driver he plans to see him in Victory Lane.

During the race, Daly moves from pit to pit among the GMS teams, a cheerful

and inspiring presence. It is difficult to see much of the race from the pits, so Daly joins pit crew members in watching a huge digital scoreboard that displays the telecast.

Races, especially at short tracks such as Martinsville, Va., feature lots of bumping and banging, with drivers sometimes spinning others out. Tempers can flare.

If a GMS driver is involved in a wreck, NASCAR mandates a trip to the infield care center where Daly meets him. After the race, drivers and crews can be joyful or sad, satisfied or extremely frustrated, and Daly hangs around to offer solace or congratulations.

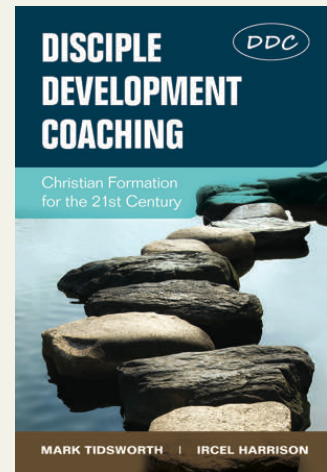
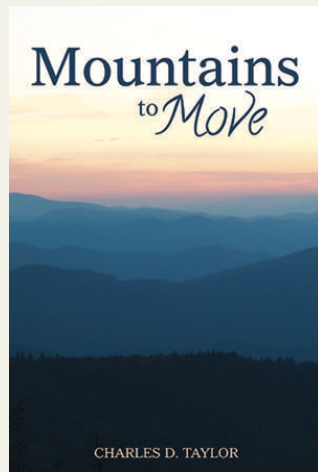
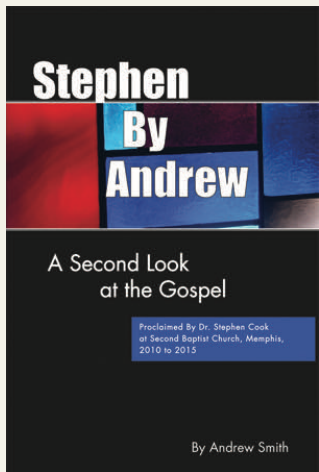
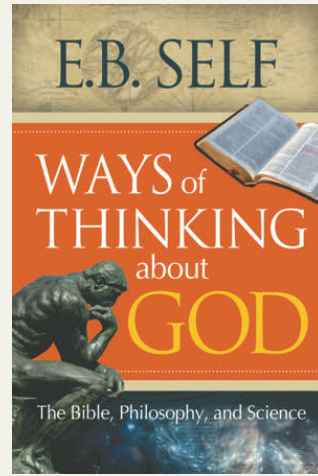
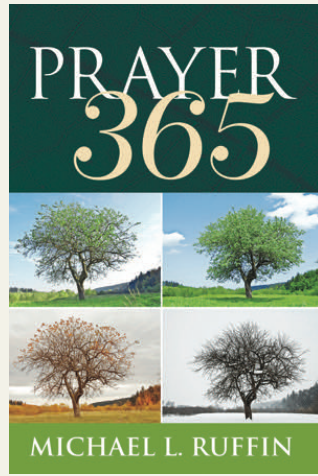
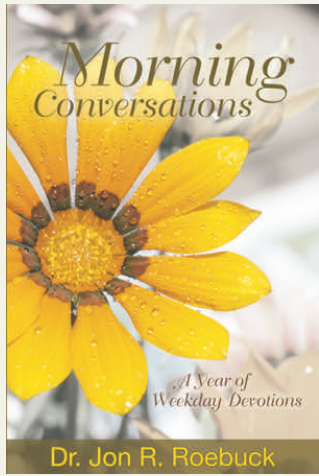
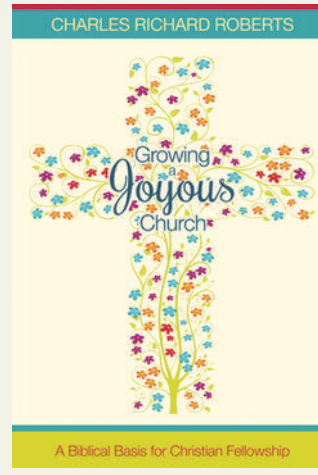
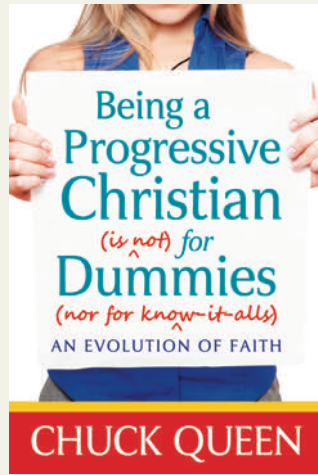
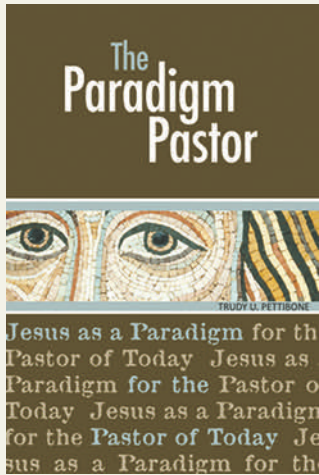
At the end of the day, Daly says, his favorite part of the job is "being able to encourage and serve some of the finest men and women in NASCAR, knowing that God has me right where I am needed."

The good folks at GMS Racing wouldn't argue with that. **NFJ**

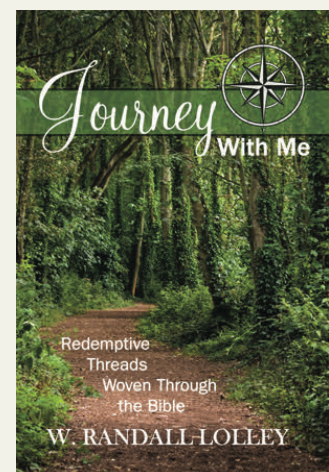
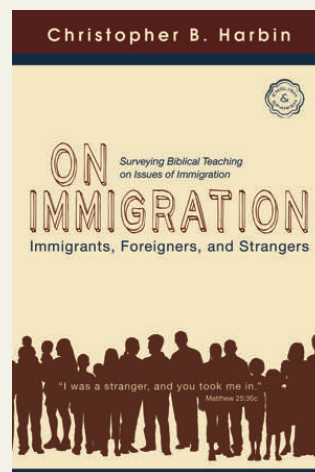
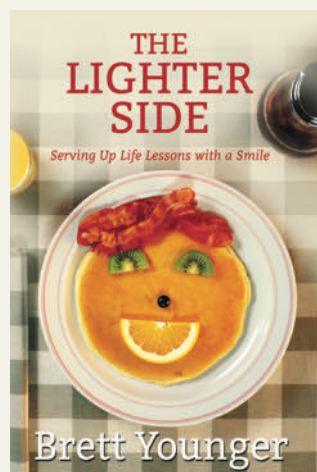
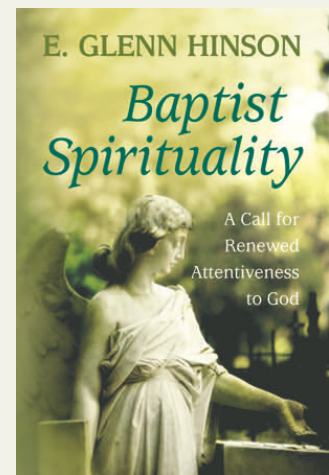
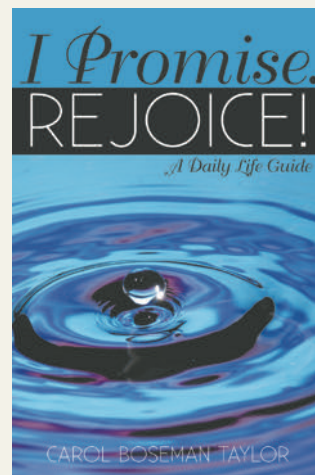
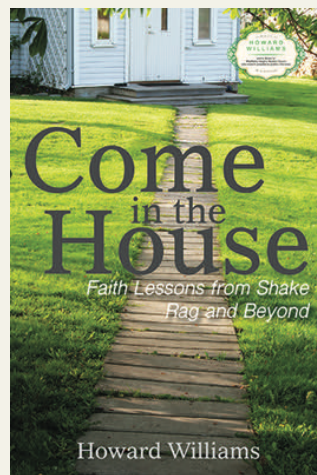
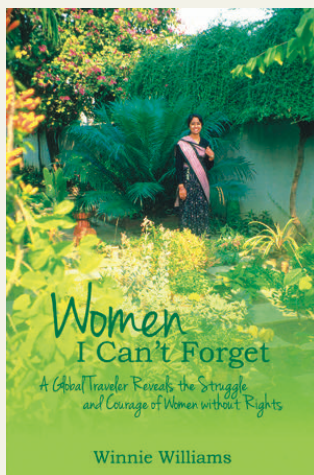
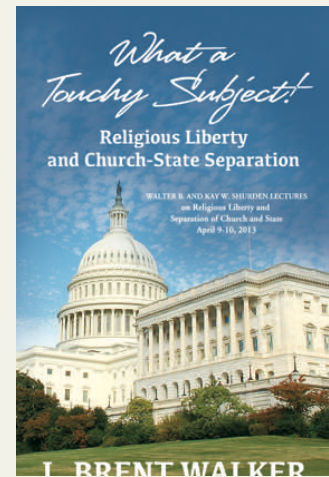
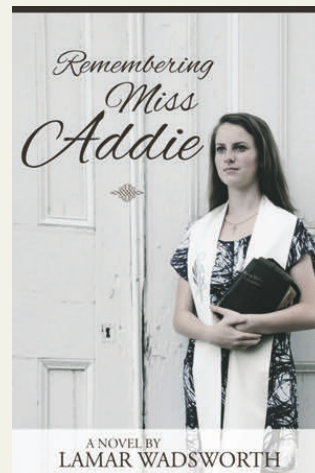
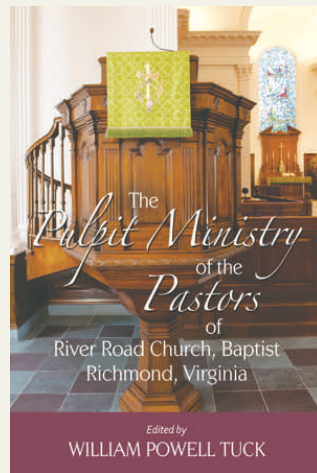
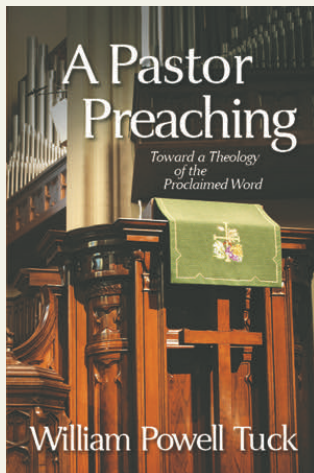


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William McKinley (1897–1901)

By Bruce Gourley

Born in Ohio in 1843, William McKinley Jr. grew up in an abolitionist family and a Methodist church. Both proved formative, but only one, Methodism, remained a lasting influence.

As a young man, McKinley formally joined the Methodist church and briefly attended a Methodist college. Falling ill and lapsing into depression while in college, however, he returned home. Upon recovery he was unable to continue his education due to failing family finances.

As the nation lurched toward civil war following the election of Abraham Lincoln as U.S. president in November 1860, a teenage McKinley obtained brief employment first as a postal worker and afterward as a schoolteacher.

Like many other young Ohio men, following the secession of the Southern slave states and the Southern Confederacy's attack on the Union, in June 1861 McKinley enlisted for service in the Union Army. An enthusiastic soldier, he served ably throughout the entire conflict, fighting in many battles and attaining the rank of major.

Serving under Ohioan and Union officer Maj. Rutherford B. Hayes, McKinley developed a lasting friendship with the future 19th U.S. president. Politically, the young man cast his first presidential ballot while in uniform, in 1864 voting for Lincoln, who won reelection.

Spiritually, he expressed deep religiosity and often attended religious gatherings in camp. His wartime diary portrays a pious soldier who considered himself “not only as a soldier for my Country, but also a Soldier of Jesus.”

After the war McKinley returned

to Ohio, became a lawyer, married, and fathered two daughters, both of whom tragically died before the age of four. Grieving and deeply depressed, Ida Saxton, McKinley's wife, developed lasting poor health, requiring her husband's constant attention. The couple remained childless thereafter.

McKinley also became active in politics, campaigning for Republican Hayes' third, and successful, run for the office of governor of Ohio.

As a lawyer, McKinley defended the rights of workers and earned the accolades of Ohio labor unions. Developing political ambitions of his own, in 1876 he simultaneously campaigned for Hayes' presidential bid and, with support from blue-collar voters, ran and was elected to the U.S. Congress.

The two Civil War veterans and friends took office in 1877. Hayes served as president for one term, while McKinley's six terms as a labor-championing congressman spanned 11 years. Defeated in his attempt for a seventh term, he then won election as governor of Ohio, serving from 1892–1896.

The Ohio native's long political career and connections led to his selection as the Republican presidential candidate in 1896. A most unusual election season unfolded between McKinley and his Democratic opponent, popular orator and former congressman William Jennings Bryan.

Amid an economic depression, monetary policy captivated politicians and the public alike. “Free silver” advocates, including Bryan, demanded unlimited minting of silver coins, rather than a restricted money supply under the traditional “gold standard” of paper currency backed by gold bullion.

An agrarian-oriented grassroots movement had coalesced into the Populist Party in 1892. Demanding measures to reduce income inequality and broaden American democracy, Populists advocated for higher taxes on the wealthy, economic equity for farmers on par with business and industry, government ownership of railroads and the direct election of U.S. senators.

In the 1896 presidential campaign the Populist Party sided with the Democrat candidate Bryan and free silver, while McKinley ran on a gold standard platform.

To cheering crowds Bryan toured the nation by train on a whistle-stop campaign tour. McKinley, bemoaning his inadequacy as a speaker, countered Bryan by opening up his Canton, Ohio home to America.

Crowds assembled Monday through Saturday on McKinley's lawn, including women who, though not allowed to vote, sought to influence their husbands. From his front porch the presidential candidate delivered hundreds of campaign speeches often tailored to specific issues of concern to a given delegation.

On Sundays the McKinleys attended their local house of worship, the First Methodist Episcopal Church.

McKinley's “Front Porch Campaign” worked. He easily won the popular vote and an electoral college majority.

In his inaugural address McKinley sounded presidential refrains of exclusive Christian nationalism peculiar to the latter decades of the 19th century and similar to that of former president, and devout Presbyterian, Benjamin Harrison (1889–1893).

Rather than reflect the broad, inclusive, non-sectarian and distant deity occasionally

This is the 25th in a series of articles by historian Bruce Gourley on the religious faith of U.S. presidents. Gourley is online editor and contributing writer for Nurturing Faith Journal and director of Nurturing Faith's Jesus Worldview Initiative.

referenced by presidents prior to Harrison, McKinley's words evoked a specifically Christian God:

... I assume the arduous and responsible duties of President of the United States, relying upon the support of my countrymen and invoking the guidance of Almighty God. Our faith teaches that there is no safer reliance than upon the God of our fathers, who has so singularly favored the American people in every national trial, and who will not forsake us so long as we obey His commandments and walk humbly in His footsteps.

Fortunately for the new president, the current national trial — an economic depression — was effectively over by inauguration day. Taking no action on monetary policy, McKinley soon signed into law the highest protective tariff in American history, pleasing organized labor. At the same time he cheered business interests by giving free reign to industrial combinations or “trusts,” a form of corporate merger.

Another pressing issue, the oppression of African Americans, garnered little interest or response from the president. Having opposed lynching as governor of Ohio, in the White House he ignored widespread terrorist violence against and mass voting disenfranchisement of black citizens in the South.

Presidential biographer Lewis L. Gould summarized the president's attitude toward race as lacking “the vision to transcend the biases of his day and to point toward a better future for all Americans.”

Foreign policy, instead, dominated William McKinley's years in the White House. Pressed by a public outcry to intervene on behalf of Cuba against Spanish rule of the island, the president provided the opening for Congress to go to war with Spain in 1898 in what became known as the Spanish-American War.

Triumphing in decisive fashion, U.S. forces occupied Cuba and annexed the Spanish islands of the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico, along with the

independent nation of Hawaii, thereby emerging as a world power.

A year later McKinley, a faithful churchman while president, spoke to a delegation of Methodist church leaders, asserting, according to a presidential interviewer, that in the midst of the war crisis he had prayed to “Almighty God for light and guidance.” From his prayers came a conviction to seize the Spanish islands.

As the islands were “unfit for self-government ... there was nothing left for us to do but to take them all, and to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them, and by God's grace do the very best we could by them, as our fellow-men for whom Christ also died.”

As he contemplated the Christianization of the Philippines, McKinley was apparently either unaware or unimpressed that the Philippines had been a Catholic nation for some four centuries.

In a 1900 address to a religious organization McKinley declared: “Piety and patriotism go well together. Love of flag, love of country, are not inconsistent with our religious faith.”

The same year in his State of the Union address he noted America's “growing strength and increasing power for good,” declaring that the nation's constitutional “inviolable rules,” including religion-state separation, “must be imposed” upon the island territories:

... no law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, and that the free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship without discrimination or preference shall forever be allowed. [...N]o form of religion and no minister of religion shall be forced upon any community or upon any citizen of the islands; that, upon the other hand, no minister of religion shall be interfered with or molested in following his calling, and that the separation between State and Church shall be real, entire, and absolute.

Nonetheless, in the ensuing decades Protestant missionary teachers flooded into the Philippines, gaining control of the island's public education system. Following the Philippines' independence in 1946, Catholicism reestablished public primacy in a secular state with constitutional religion-state separation.

Widely popular among the white American public, and amid massive disenfranchisement of black voters from the rolls during his presidency, McKinley easily won reelection in 1900, again defeating Democrat Bryan and his remaining Populist allies.

Months into his second term in office, President McKinley, while attending the 1901 Pan-American Exhibit in Buffalo, N.Y., was shot by an assassin's bullet on Sept. 1.

Leon Czolgosz, his assailant, was a 28-year-old Polish immigrant from Detroit. Having labored in a steel mill as a child, Czolgosz in his early adult years embraced anarchist ideology and came to view McKinley's administration as corrupt and an enemy of the working people.

On Sept. 16, the 25th president and last Civil War veteran to hold the office, died from complications associated with his shooting. His reported last words included stanzas from the hymn “Nearer, My God, to Thee,” followed by “Goodbye, all, goodbye. It is God's way. His will be done.”

Vice-president Theodore Roosevelt assumed the presidency. Czolgosz was convicted of murder and executed in an electric chair the following month.

Some historians consider McKinley the first modern president organizationally. In addition, he modernized the politics of presidential religion.

Throughout his life and as president, McKinley regularly attended Methodist worship services, prayed and read the Bible. He also solidified recently formed, sectarian and assertive Christian nationalism as a powerful force within presidential politics, signaling the end of an earlier era marked by presidential affirmations of strict religion-state separation alongside acknowledgment of religious pluralism as a national strength.^{NFJ}

Brinson shared ministry, mission with King family, others

BY JOHN D. PIERCE

ATLANTA— “It was the church that made us who we were,” said Albert Paul Brinson, standing in the historic sanctuary of Ebenezer Baptist Church, that he attended as a youth and later served as associate minister to co-pastors Martin Luther King Sr. and Martin Luther King Jr. “It was our hope.”

Brinson, 79, told participants in the daylong Nurturing Faith Experience on civil rights last September about how the elder King (“Reverend King Sr.,” as he called him) was firm but loving — peeking out the front door and pointing at his watch when it was time for Albert and other youngsters to come inside for worship.

Brinson lovingly mocked his mentor pausing during a sermon to stop the talking among the youth in the balcony. “He’d call you out,” said Brinson. “Albert! ‘A.D.’ ‘M.L.’!”

Albert was eight years old when his father left his mother with three little boys living in public housing in the neighborhood now well identified with the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta and beyond. He often hung out in the King home.

The elder King baptized young Albert in the basement of that church — now restored to its 1960s appearance and protected as part of a national historic site. He also filled a deep personal void.

“Reverend King Sr. was the father image for me my entire life,” said Brinson.

COUNTRY ROADS

Brinson said Reverend King Sr. came from rural roots, which showed most clearly when the two would travel back roads from Atlanta to Montgomery where Martin Jr. (or, “M.L.,” as Albert called him) served as pastor in the latter half of the ‘50s and rose to prominence as a civil rights leader.



Albert Brinson shared ministry, movement with the Kings. Photo by Bill Powell.

Brinson learned to drive on those trips during which the elder King insisted on playing “Dog!” — a travel game that built points according to who could first spot a dog of a certain color or type along the way.

In addition to having to keep his eyes on the road, Brinson suffered another strategic disadvantage in the game: Reverend King’s rural upbringing.

Brinson told of passing an old farmhouse and hearing Reverend King shout, “Dog! Dog!” But Albert saw no dogs. He didn’t know to look under the porch where shade was provided for the hounds.

FUNNY FAMILY

The seriousness of the Civil Rights Movement and the sacrificial role the Kings played in the quest for justice belie a family trait that few know about today, said Brinson. “They were a funny family.”

Humor was spread widely — and used effectively when needed. Brinson recalled the time Martin Luther King Jr., tongue in cheek, said aloud to his teen-aged, younger brother figure: “Albert, you could never get into Morehouse.”

Those words meant in jest and as

motivation crossed the years and rang in Brinson’s ears when his portrait was placed in the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College as a way to honor a distinguished alumnus whose own contributions to civil rights were faithful.

“They were always joking and playing around,” said Brinson of the King family, with whom he retains close ties, especially Christine King Farris, the oldest and only remaining sibling of Martin Luther King Jr.

Humor conveys humility, Brinson suggested. “We live in a selfish culture now, but M.L. was not like that.”

Brinson said he learned from the Kings to see humor — in even serious situations — as a way to gain better perspectives, such as the time Brinson and other Atlanta college students wrote “The Appeal for Human Rights” that was published widely and set the stage for the student sit-in movement.

Government officials opposed to civil rights sought to discredit the effort by saying that these black college students could not have written such a well-stated document.

“They said the Russians did it!” Brinson recalled with a smile. “That’s funny now...” **NFJ**



If you receive this issue before the New Year, please consider a year-end gift to Baptists Today/Nurturing Faith in 2017. Thank you!

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New habits for the new year

BY JOHN F. BRIDGES

Director of Development

Recently I was challenged to break some old, bad habits and to make some new ones. My young physician (they're getting younger) said my blood work results were not what she hoped for, nor what I needed to be as healthy as I wanted to be.

I needed to change some habits. So, I did. After three full months of a biscuit-free, fried-chicken-free and doughnut-free diet, my young doctor recorded a 17-pound weight loss and better yet, "I love my numbers."

The spiritual discipline we call stewardship is — like all of life — a matter of embracing good habits. For this new year, please

consider making Baptists Today/Nurturing Faith Journal one of your good, giving habits.

And in addition to determining your monthly, quarterly or annual gift, please consider making Baptists Today, Inc. (Nurturing Faith) a part of your estate plans that will allow your gifts to live beyond you.

Thank you very much for being part of this vital ministry — and for all the good habits that flow from it. Please let me hear from you if I can help!

—John Bridges

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Questions Christians ask scientists

As a Christian, I want to believe in miracles but am a little skeptical.
Does science disprove miracles?

A boy lies on his deathbed while his family prays for a miracle. Not only his family, but his entire church also prays. This congregation knows Luke 18:1-8, the parable of the persistent widow, and believes in the power of relentless prayer.

So it goes for more than three weeks, 24 hours a day: a well-organized and faithful prayer effort. The people ask for a miracle. The people hope for a miracle. Some, in light of the parable, expect a miracle. But in the end the boy dies and the family and congregation are heartbroken.

Stories like this are not uncommon. They are almost certainly more common than stories that start similarly but have happy endings. As Christians we may pray for miracles, but how often do they happen, even when they are desperately needed? Or, do they happen at all?

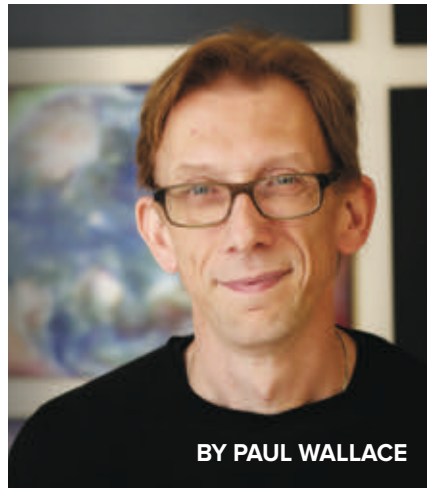
It is natural to wonder about miracles. The parable in Luke is not the only place in the Bible that causes us to seek the miraculous. In scripture, the whole world is a theater of the divine.

Earthquakes, locust swarms, floods, and storms at sea are attributed to the hand of God. Interpretations of such events were theological because there were no other fruitful ways to understand them. God acted everywhere, all the time, and with humans in mind.

Miracles, which scripture clearly recognizes as special cases of divine action, are nonetheless easily integrated into the worldview of the Bible. They are woven naturally into its cosmic tapestry.

But our worldview is not strictly biblical. This is a fact, not a judgment. We see things differently than the authors of scripture did, and this is as it should be. The world has changed in many ways since the Bible was written. In particular, science has radically altered our view of God's creation and our place within it.

But a number of prominent scientists



BY PAUL WALLACE

Paul Wallace is a Baptist minister with a doctorate in experimental nuclear physics from Duke University and post-doctoral work in gamma ray astronomy, along with a theology degree from Emory University. He teaches at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Ga. Faith-science questions for consideration may be submitted to editor@nurturingfaith.net.

claim that science disproves miracles along with God. For them the triumph of science is so complete that there is simply no room in the cosmos for parting seas, virgin births, wine from water or resurrection from the dead.

Their view seems to be that, since there is no scientific basis for such events, they must not occur. Matter is all there is. Every event is natural and has natural causes.

It is not only scientifically motivated atheists who believe this. Many others, including some Christians, believe it in their own way or suspect it on some level. After all, miracles do seem terribly rare; suffering is widespread and arbitrary; and science explains so much, it does appear to rule out the miraculous.

It may be Isaac Newton's fault. He was one of the truly staggering scientific minds in human history. He is best known for his three laws of mechanics and his theory of

gravity, spelled out in his 1687 work, the *Principia*.

His view was that objects move because external forces make them move (this is actually technically incorrect, but it will do for our purpose). The word I wish to emphasize is *external* — a thing moves because something outside of it makes it move. It has no say in the matter.

In Newton's cosmos there is no freedom. Causes lead to definite effects, which themselves are causes for subsequent effects, and so on.

For example, a hockey puck moves because it has been slapped by a stick — pushed by a force external to the puck itself. It comes to rest because of friction with the ice, also a force external to the puck itself. Every cause leads to its effect in a mechanical and mathematically determined way, with no room left over for miracles.

Now imagine this mechanical viewpoint spreading out to permeate all things and all events. There are no surprises in such a universe.

If we could somehow know the precise location and speed of every particle in Newton's cosmos at the present time, then we could also know the past and predict all events into the infinite future. This is Newton's vision: an impersonal clockwork universe, fixed and predetermined, so different from the God-saturated, miracle-rich world of scripture.

The success and power of the Newtonian worldview cannot be overstated. The *Principia* exploded old ways of thinking and touched nearly every enterprise in the modern world. It launched the industrial revolution and the space age. And, to some degree, we have all absorbed it. It even permeates our language.

"We are Newtonians, fervent and devout, when we speak of forces and masses, of action and reaction, when we say that a sports team or a political candidate



has momentum; when we note the inertia or a tradition or a bureaucracy; and when we stretch out an arm and feel the force of gravity, pulling earthward. Pre-Newtonians did not feel such a force,” writes James Gleick in his delightful (and delightfully short) biography *Isaac Newton*.

As influential as Newton’s vision has been, however, there are other ways to view the physical world. In the early 20th century the science of quantum mechanics was born and today has matured into a pillar of modern science. This branch of physics describes things that are truly tiny — think molecules, atoms and atomic nuclei.

It is deeply counter-intuitive and unequivocally contrary to the mechanical, cause-and-effect view of Newton. The great Englishman is no guide in the strange halls of quantum mechanics. Surprises abound at the quantum level.

At that depth there are well-defined and absolute limits on what we can know; the future is unpredictable and the past unknowable, even with perfect knowledge of the present; Newtonian cause-and-effect

does not exist; matter is wavy and indefinite; particles spontaneously pop into and out of existence; and information seems to travel instantaneously from one place to another, breaking even Einstein’s cosmic speed limit.

Quantum mechanics breaks us out of Newton’s cause-and-effect straightjacket. And it may be more amenable to the miraculous. I do not mean this new vision of matter proves that miracles happen, but that it does away with the old restricting belief that the world is a fixed and determined mechanism.

The problem is that the building blocks of matter behave in weird and surprising and non-mechanical ways, but we are still relying on our Newtonian reflexes when it comes to miracles. The world is not a mechanism; it is stranger and more fascinating than that.

The problem is not that matter is all there is, but that we think we know what matter is, and we probably don’t, even after 400 years of physics. We are ignorant of so much.

Perhaps people were more gullible in

earlier ages. Perhaps they were more likely to explain things they didn’t understand in terms of the miraculous. Certainly science has allowed us to stop talking about every volcano and earthquake in theological terms. We have learned a lot.

But it’s also possible that our gullibility simply runs in the opposite direction. If past generations were too quick to attribute events to the direct action of God, perhaps we are too quick to see blind impersonal forces.

A final thought: As influential as Newtonian physics has been on the popular imagination, it, like all science, can only tell us what usually happens. And, as physicist and Anglican priest John Polkinghorne says, what *usually* happens is not the same as what *always* happens.

We may wonder about the reality of miracles, and science may have something to do with our skepticism, but science always has limits. It is powerless to disprove any given miracle. Ultimately, the question of miracles is a theological one, not a scientific one. **NFJ**

"Paul Wallace is an astrophysicist who writes with magic..."

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