

THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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Why You Need to Read This

Dear Brethren,

Some of you are familiar with *Country* magazine, where they hide an image of a needle somewhere in the pages of each issue for readers to find. Sometimes it is easy to spot, other times not. So let me get this off my chest up front: Like that hidden needle, there is a hidden flaw in this letter to you. I will reveal the flaw at the end, but my guess is that discerning readers will figure it out.

Mr. Richard Ames is famous for asking congregations for a show of hands of how many watched the latest telecast or read the latest magazine. After scanning the audience, he then announces the percentage of the crowd who raised their hands, using an impressive degree of precision, such as 38.4 percent. This usually brings a chuckle from those present, as a guess like this can never be so exact, but, sadly, the figure is often less than what we might hope it would be.

While I rarely ask for a show of hands at services, it is evident to me from conversations before and after services that this is indeed the situation. Many members do not watch the telecast and many do not read our literature. This is a curious phenomenon, as we find that some of these same members are well-versed in the literature of others. And it is evident that the problem is not lack of time, as people today spend loads of time on Facebook, snapchat, twitter, e-mail and/or television.

One must wonder why this is the case. Perhaps our writings are not compelling enough for members to read them or our *Tomorrow's World* telecasts fail to compete favorably with other options. If that is the case, we sincerely apologize. And please do not think this is a veiled request for compliments, encouraging faithful members to write supportive and encouraging letters. It is not. We know that there is great sup-

port and many prayers offered up to God for the telecast, our literature, and for us personally. Instead, this is an attempt to encourage all members to prioritize their lives so that they know the direction God is leading us. After all, either God is working through His servants or He is not!

The Bible is a compilation of historical books, poetry, compelling stories, genealogical records and letters. In the New Testament, we find the Apostles writing personal letters to congregations and individuals. Paul wrote 14 that are included in the New Testament. James, the brother of Christ, wrote a letter so powerful that Martin Luther wished it were not in the Bible. The Apostle Peter wrote two letters, and John wrote three. John also wrote a letter to be passed from one congregation to another in Asia Minor. We can read it in the Book of Revelation, chapters two and three.

In a broader sense, all of Revelation is a letter to the Church of God down through time. This is evident from the first four verses of the book. Verse one tells us it is for the servants of God. In verse four we find John sending the entire book to seven churches (or congregations) in Asia Minor. It is clear that the servants of God—the entire body of Christ—and the seven churches are synonymous. The context shows that the seven churches represent all of God's servants from the first century until Christ returns. John confirms this in verses 6 and 16 of the last chapter.

Some have suggested that the book of Acts is incomplete and that more history will be added to it after Christ returns, to fill in the story of the Church for the last two thousand years. However, this is pure speculation and should probably be labeled wishful thinking.

Regardless, the point is that churches, and individual Christians, had letters written to them, and only later did the

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Church realize their enduring importance. We know the apostles and others wrote books and letters not preserved as part of the Holy Scripture (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:9; 3 John 9; Jude 14). How could an early Christian discern what would become part of a lasting record, and what would not? Does this mean that other letters, written by these men, were somehow in error? Were they not important at the time? Should we take communications from the Church lightly? Or neglect them?

We often refer to Hebrews 10:25, where Paul admonishes us not to forsake assembling together, as some were doing even back then, especially as we see the return of Christ approaching. Do we know why? Part of the reason is found in the preceding

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verse: “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works” (v. 24). This is one reason we attend services, even if the sermon is not “live.” Verses 23 and 26 give further context. There is a danger of drifting away from our baptismal confession. We must remain faithful over the long haul, for it is possible to drift away and sin willfully, thus losing everything!

Jesus made a powerful statement in the Parable of the Sower that applies to all of us, especially those of us who have accepted His way of life. He gives four categories of seeds that are sown. The fact that you are reading this probably indicates that the category you should be most concerned about involves the seeds that fall among thorns. “Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22).

Has there ever been a more distracting age than the one in which we live? Too many—even of our brethren—are wrapped

up in this world and tangled in its weeds. They (we) need to come to grips with what is happening and repent! My recent *Tomorrow’s World* article “Tame the Social Media Monster” is important in this regard. When some of the very founders of social media are alarmed, we ought to take warning. They do not understand what we do about the ruler of this world, but they see danger (Ephesians 2:1–2; 2 Corinthians 4:3–4). Do we (Proverbs 22:3)?

Dr. Meredith’s series on the Protestant Reformation is a major statement on religion that needs our attention. It shows in a profound way why the Bible refers to the Protestant churches as it does in Revelation 17:5. You may not remember all the details, but you will get the point! I personally came out of Protestantism and at one time thought that I was better than my Roman Catholic friends. This indicated a lack of understanding that I have long since overcome. Nevertheless, there is much that I did not know about the history of this movement.

It is important for all members to keep up to date with trends in the world, with why we believe what we do, and with encouragement to hold fast to the truth (Luke 21:36). Many members in the Worldwide Church, a church that many of us were once a part of, were not reading what that church was publishing. I was shocked at how few questions were asked when the *God Is...* booklet came out, teaching multiple heresies. I was equally shocked when leaders in that organization claimed that Mark 7 abolished the laws of clean and unclean meats, and how many members fell for that lie. Repetition of the truth is important, lest the weeds obscure and choke off our understanding. It is more important to read the Bible itself, but keeping up with Church publications is also vital to our salvation in an era full of distractions. They remind us of biblical doctrines, warn of current dangers in a corrupt age, and encourage us to hold fast to the truth.

I mentioned at the start of this letter that there is a flaw in it. Do you see it? It is, very simply, the fact that those who need this advice the most may never actually read it!



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Have You Bought the Lies?

Four major social issues today are abortion, the LGBT movement, legalizing marijuana, and so-called “mercy killing” or euthanasia. In America, we could also add the “right to carry”—that is, to carry guns. You might wonder why we mention these issues. Don’t we already talk about them enough? Actually, if we were to anonymously survey our membership, especially our teens, you might be surprised by what many think regarding each of these issues. Why?

We are all products of the world and culture in which we live. We may understand this academically, but often fail to realize how strong that influence is when we are actually put to the test. Those living today, from Baby Boomers to Millennials and “Generation Z,” live in a world where political incorrectness and traditional values are presented as the greatest evils. Few realize or admit how much the world influences their thinking. This is true of those in the Church as well as those outside.

Our children are alarmingly immersed in this “good is evil and evil is good” cesspool, and they do not have the experience to fully evaluate what is happening around them. The Book of Proverbs is in the Bible “to give prudence to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion” (Proverbs 1:4). Today’s youth are not inherently more evil than previous generations. However, lacking the experience to compare and the wisdom to discern, they are taken in by ideas far more dangerous than some earlier generations were exposed to. This is why active parenting is so vital. Parents must counteract the influence of friends, school and all forms of entertainment. But if the parents are also absorbing the values of this world, *how can they teach their children right from wrong?*

What is it that makes an action right or wrong? Is it human reason? Is it majority vote? The answers to these questions may seem obvious, but are they?

Persuaded by Propaganda?

Political correctness today dictates that you cannot say, act, react or do anything that makes someone else feel bad about himself—unless that person subscribes to traditional or biblical values. Those people are fair game for anyone, including academia and the media,

to insult, criticize and ridicule. Believing in a biblical standard of right and wrong is politically incorrect, and therefore unacceptable.

It is our nature to desire to fit in, to go along with the prevailing view, and few are willing to buck the tide and be different. Furthermore, there is a continuous propaganda campaign around us selling false values, and it is easy to be swayed by often-repeated clever reasoning (2 Corinthians 11:3; 2 Peter 2:19).

The worldview of those in God’s Church ought to be radically different from that of those around us. We assume that those sitting with us each Sabbath share our worldview. However, those who have been with the Church of God for several decades probably remember how shocked they were at how quickly members abandoned the truth and leapt back into the world when heresies were introduced. Peter compares them to dogs returning to their own vomit and sows wallowing in their mire after being cleaned up (2 Peter 2:22).

One has to wonder how this could have happened. Were they never convicted of the truth, as we were? Or did they secretly chafe under God’s law? Did they resent keeping the biblical Feasts? Did they disagree with tithing? Had they never given up the Trinity doctrine, inspired as it was by pagan Greek philosophers? During and following the rebellion of the mid-90s, many members said they disagreed with the Church’s doctrines on these and other matters. What happened? In many ways the answer is found in Romans 8:7: “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.”

The entire history of God’s working with mankind shows how quickly people return to the world around them. Time and again, Israel abandoned the true worship of God by blending heathen practices with the ways of God. As Elijah challenged the people of his day, “How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21).

This desire to live in two different worlds is a strong temptation. Many who grow up “in the Church” remind me of the 1950s television drama, “I Led Three Lives.” It was based on the true-life story of Herbert Philbrick. All that his friends and family saw was his role as husband, father and white-collar worker, but he had two

other lives. He also worked as a communist spy, *and* he was actually a double-agent working for the FBI as a *counter*-communist spy. He was constantly on guard to protect his credibility with whichever side was watching him. One can only imagine the stress this created!

Similarly, some members and teens live three lives. Friends and neighbors see one life. A second life is lived on the Sabbath, around the ministry and members who are viewed as solidly in the Church. Then there is the third life, away from the Church and around friends who are wrapped up in the culture of this world. Many young people describe their experience before baptism as having one foot in the world and the other in the Church. They desire the world, but keep a toe in the Church, just in case.

However, this article is not about young people only. It is about all members, and about those things we may stubbornly hang on to. What is it that you have not been willing to give up? Do you disagree with our stance regarding marijuana? Apparently, some do. Do you believe that so-called “mercy killing” is okay, even though one of the Ten Commandments tells us “Do not kill [commit murder]”? What about abortion? And do you privately believe that God made homosexuals and lesbians to be “born that way,” that He put males in female bodies and vice versa? Or do you believe the Bible, that these abominations are choices people make (Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:18–32)?

Marijuana is an interesting case in point. In spite of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, many people still believe it is harmless and beneficial. Please note: We do not deny that there may be medicinal properties found in part of this weed, but the medical benefits do not generally appear to come from the hallucinogenic ingredient, THC. “But it’s a natural substance!” some will say. “It’s now legal!” So are poison ivy and tobacco! Is it not odd that at the very time when there is an all-out war against tobacco, there is a push to fill your lungs with another kind of smoke?

So, let me be clear on this subject. We will not hold back from telling the truth to the world and to the Church!

Recreational marijuana is of this world! It falls into the category of the “lust of the flesh,” and God instructs us through His Apostle not to love the world (1 John 2:15–17). All this talk about “medical marijuana” is a smoke screen for legalizing a substance people use to get high. Are any of us so

lacking in discernment as not to recognize that (Ephesians 2:2–3; 6:12; 2 Corinthians 10:5)?

Our booklet *Marijuana: What They Aren’t Telling You* lays out the facts, but if someone is hell-bent on using marijuana, even this fine booklet will not convince him or her otherwise. Neither will the fact that we give examples of how marijuana has shattered marriages, destroyed lives, and led some to go further into a drug culture with disastrous effects. The problem with this is that facts do not change the heart, and as we learn from Jeremiah, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).

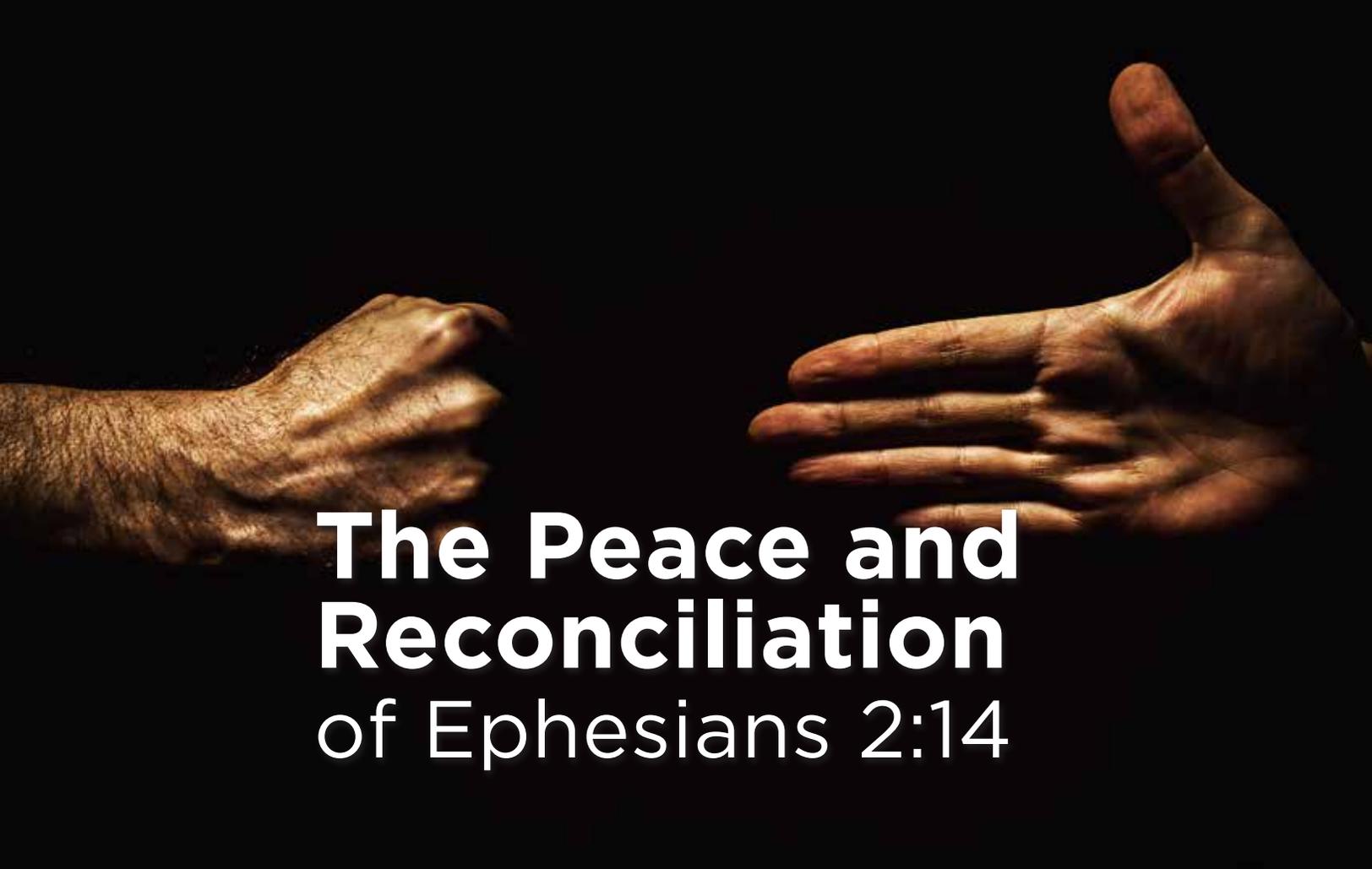
When people think the world is ahead of God and the way He leads His Church on an issue, there is something wrong with their thinking. **It is God and the laws of God that spell out proper behavior.** That is the only standard that counts when discussing right and wrong.

Why the Law?

Jesus summed up the law with two statements: You shall love God with all your heart, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37–39). Both come from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:9–18). This tells us that the foundation of God’s law is love. We understand that love is outgoing concern. This is another way of saying that we are to treat others with the same care and concern with which we want others to treat us (Matthew 7:12). This does not mean we must agree with, accept, condone, support or celebrate every act or behavior.

Today we are expected to agree with the LGBTQ community. If Johnny wants to be JoAnne, we are expected to encourage him. “Yet,” as Dr. Paul McHugh, Distinguished Professor of Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University, explained in the *Wall Street Journal*, “policy makers and the media are doing no favors either to the public or the transgendered by treating their confusions as a right in need of defending rather than as a mental disorder that deserves understanding, treatment and prevention. This intensely felt sense of being transgendered constitutes a mental disorder in two respects. The first is that the idea of sex misalignment is simply mistaken—it does not correspond with physical reality. The second is that it can lead to grim psychological outcomes” (“Transgender Surgery Isn’t the Solution,” June 12, 2014).

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The Peace and Reconciliation of Ephesians 2:14

By **Wyatt Ciesielka**

There are real walls, and there are symbolic walls. There are helpful walls, and there are harmful walls. A well-maintained wall surrounding a beautifully manicured garden is valuable and beneficial. Anciently, a strong wall around a town was a source of protection from attack. However, whether in ancient or modern times, a wall of division or unjust imprisonment that cuts one off from freedom or family can be a source of anguish and pain.

Spiritually, Scripture reveals that God surrounds those who properly fear and obey Him with a beneficial and protective “wall” (or “hedge”) that guards them from evil (Job 1:9, 10). Conversely, practicing sin separates or cuts people off from God (cf. Numbers 9:13; Matthew 7:23; 13:49–50).

The Bible also reveals another wall—an ancient physical wall that came to symbolize a *spiritual* wall. And the Bible reveals that two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ broke down that spiritual wall! What was it? What spiritual condition did it represent? And what are the New Covenant lessons for Christians today? It is very important for us to understand the amazing promise of Ephesians 2:14, what Jesus Christ did, and what His actions mean for us today.

Confusion in the Commentaries

Ephesians 2:13–16 records the words of the Apostle Paul on this topic:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

What was this “middle wall of separation,” and why did Christ abolish it? How do many misunderstand this passage of Scripture? And what benefits and obligations do Christians have *because* Jesus broke down the wall?

Many reputable Bible commentaries provide helpful history and context when discussing this passage, but they often give only *part* of the answer, or may even mislead the reader. The respected *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* is a good example, mixing a little helpful information with misleading assumptions. Let’s look at its comments on Ephesians 2:15 and then examine them more closely:

The barrier between Jews and Gentiles was overthrown when Christ effectively disposed of the old law with its meticulously defined sanctions enshrined in its innumerable decrees. Paul explains elsewhere that in itself the law is right and good, but that unregenerate man is incapable of complying with its demands Romans 3:19–31.... A somewhat cumbersome phrase (literally, “the law of the commandments in decrees”) covers the Mosaic ordinances regarded as a statutory legal code. “Regulations” (*dogmata*) was applied to imperial edicts (Volume 11, 1981 Edition).

This explanation is a little ambiguous, which can be confusing—especially for those wrongly influenced by “grace alone” theology. In its explanation, *Expositor’s* uses the phrase “old law with its meticulously defined sanctions enshrined in its innumerable decrees” and then references the “Mosaic ordinances.” What does that mean? It can seem as though *Expositor’s* is saying that Jesus Christ “effectively disposed” of the entire Old Covenant and even the Ten Commandments. What exactly did Jesus Christ “effectively dispose of” in Ephesians 2:14-15? As we’ll see, there is a better explanation.

Another popular commentary—*Jamieson, Fausset & Brown*, or *JFB* for short—in its explanation of Ephesians 2:14 explains that the “middle wall of partition” was “a balustrade of stone that separated the court of the Gentiles from the holy place, which it was death for a Gentile to pass.” Additionally, *JFB* rightly explains that it was Jesus Christ who made peace and became our “peacemaker”—reconciling Jews and Gentiles together and reconciling both to God. However, *JFB* then attempts to use Ephesians 2:14–15 to “do away with” the law—as so many other commentaries, as well as many who profess a doctrine of “grace alone,” attempt to do today.

JFB wrongly takes the wall of partition that Christ broke down and equates it with “the Sinaitic law,” asserting that the law God gave at Mount Sinai separated Gentiles from Jews and from God—and thus suggests that Jesus Christ *had* to break it down because it was the “Sinaitic law” (i.e., the Ten Commandments) that was at fault!

These commentaries get it wrong! The “wall of separation” that Jesus broke down was *not* the “Sinaitic law.” Jesus Christ did *not* destroy or “break down” the Ten Commandments! *It is wrong to interpret the grace that the Father and the Son demonstrated through Jesus Christ’s act of sacrifice—which is the topic of Ephesians 2:14—to mean that Christ did away with the Law!*

How do we know this? Claiming that Ephesians 2:14–15 does away with the Law contradicts *many* scriptures, including Matthew 5:17, where Jesus Christ Himself explained that

He did *not* come to “destroy” the law. Instead, Jesus explained that He came to “fulfill” the law—which can be translated “to perform to perfection” or “to cause to abound.” Jesus Christ obeyed God’s law *perfectly*, and we should try to imitate Him in this regard (1 Corinthians 11:1)!

What Were the “Ordinances”?

So, what is Ephesians 2:15 saying that Christ abolished, and why? The word “ordinances” in the phrase “the law of commandments contained in ordinances” comes from the Greek word *dogma*. This term can refer to *public decrees* (for example, by the Roman Senate) or to the *civil decrees* that the Jews had put in place, separating Jew from Gentile in society and in various facets of worship. In this regard, some commentaries like *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* and *Jamieson, Fausset & Brown* can be *helpful*. For example, *Expositor’s* rightly identifies the regulations as *dogmata* (the genitive case of the word *dogma*), a word indicating “statutory legal code” issued by civil governments—i.e., “imperial edicts.” However, it then wrongly assumes Paul was applying the word to “Mosaic ordinances,” God’s law, when the passage says nothing of the sort. In fact, as we’ve already noted, that would contradict many other scriptures. The “ordinances” here do not refer to God’s Holy Law—the Ten Commandments and their related statutes! The *dogma* referred to here were particular **humanly** devised ordinances.

For example, in Luke 2:1, we see that a “decree” (a *dogma*) went out from Caesar Augustus that the entire Roman Empire should be registered. This was, of course, why Joseph and Mary went up from Galilee to Bethlehem and how Jesus came to be born there.

Note what Mr. Richard Ames wrote in his March–April 2008 *Tomorrow’s World* article, “How To Study Your Bible”:

Some careless Bible students wrongly take Ephesians 2:15 to mean that God’s Ten Commandments and His moral law are done away for Christians. That verse reads: “having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances.” But if we look closely at that verse, we see that the word translated as “ordinances”—which is *dogma*, in the Greek—refers to the man-made laws, which many Jews of Jesus’ day had used to cause division between themselves and Gentiles. The principle is to study all the Bible’s references on a topic, so we can be sure we understand it.

Old Testament Principles of Separation

Why did the Jews add these man-made laws or ordinances—these *dogma* that came to symbolize a larger division between themselves and Gentiles? We do not know all the details, but

they may have created such ordinances as man-made extensions of principles in the law—such as those passages that communicate God’s qualifications for inclusion in the “assembly of the LORD.”

We sometimes may not consider just how much God was working with Old Testament Israel *in a spiritual sense* as well as in a physical manner. For example, God desired for ancient Israel to be *righteous* (Deuteronomy 4:7–10). This is a *spiritual* condition. When we consider God’s ceremonial regulations, it is profitable to consider what spiritual lesson may have been intended, as well.

Deuteronomy 23:1–8 is an example of where God is *giving both physical and spiritual conditions* for one to be included in the house of Israel—the “assembly of the LORD.” Notice that Moabites and Ammonites and their descendants were forbidden from being part of the congregation, even to the tenth generation (v. 3). Why was this? Did God not love such people?

Of course He did. John 3:16 makes it very clear that God loved the **whole world** enough to give His Son for all. The Moabites and the Ammonites were excluded *for a time* be-

God desired Israel to be a “holy people,” because they were His “special treasure” (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2), and He desired for them to be an example to the nations around them (Deuteronomy 4:1–6). **But God is very clear that He did not choose Israel because they were a great people.**

cause they had been hostile to Israel after the Exodus (v. 4), demonstrating that *sin brings consequences to a people*. Likewise, those of illegitimate birth and their descendants were prohibited from being part of the “assembly of the LORD” for a time (v. 2). Why? Again, *because sin brings consequences*.

But God never intended there to be perpetual division or animosity between Jews and Gentiles!

Even if, for ceremonial purposes, the inner courts of the Temple grounds were for circumcised Israelites only (cf. Ezekiel 44:5–9), God never intended there to be a permanent closing off of Gentiles forever from being part of the people of God.

The Jews added civil ordinances of their own design to God’s ceremonial ordinances, found in places like Deuteronomy 23. These man-made ordinances concerning the “middle wall of separation” on the grounds of the Temple in Jesus’ day—keeping Gentiles on the outside while Jews were on the inside—were used by Paul to represent the human attitude of division and animosity that the Jews had toward the Gentiles.

Many of the Jews—on their own—would never have been inclined to accept Gentiles into fellowship (cf. Acts 11:2–3). There was *no peace* between Jew and Gentile in that way. Yet God brought Gentile (as well as Israelite) “near” through the blood of Christ (Ephesians 2:13). He broke down the “middle wall of separation” by His sacrifice (v. 14). He abolished the enmity and made peace between Jew and Gentile, making them *one in the faith, with each other and with Him* (vv. 15–16)!

Why Ancient Israel Was Special

Ancient Israel was called by God to be a special people. This was not because they were *better* than anyone else. As John 3:16 makes clear, God loves *every* nation. However, God does tell us *why* He chose and delivered Israel—and it was not because of Israel’s greatness. It was because of *Abraham’s faith and obedience* and *God’s covenant with him* that He chose Israel.

Genesis 17 records the Eternal’s *conditional* covenant with Abraham, before Isaac was born (vv. 1–8). Then, Genesis 22 records that God made His covenant *unconditional*, promising to pass it on through Isaac to Abraham’s descendants (vv. 12–18). Exodus 2:24 then notes that God remembered His covenant with Israel when they were in captivity—and while they were far from being a mighty people! God made it clear time and time again that He worked in mighty ways with Israel, giving them His laws and delivering them from bondage, “because He loved your *fathers*, therefore He chose their descendants after them” (Deuteronomy 4:37). Consequently, God expected Israel to behave as a special, holy nation (vv. 39–40).

God desired the children of Israel to be a “holy people,” because they were His “special treasure” (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2), and He desired for them to be *an example* to the nations around them (Deuteronomy 4:1–6). But God is very clear that He did not choose Israel because they were a great people. Instead, He explains that they were the “least [numerous] of all peoples” (Deuteronomy 7:7), they were stubborn, and they were “stiff-necked” (Deuteronomy 9:6)! And Israel—all the children of Israel, not just the Jews—has remained this way even to Christ’s time and, without doubt, to our own time, as well!

By the time of the Apostles, when Jews were living side by side with Gentiles throughout the Roman Empire, Jesus Christ and the Apostles plainly instructed that all races and peoples share an equality before Christ (John 3:16; Romans 2:11). As Paul wrote in Colossians 3:11, “there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.” This is very sim-

ilar to what the Eternal instructed ancient Israel when He commanded, “*The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you*” (Exodus 12:49, *NASB*). God also explained that He “shows no partiality,” telling Israel to “love the stranger” because they had been “strangers in the land of Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:17–19).

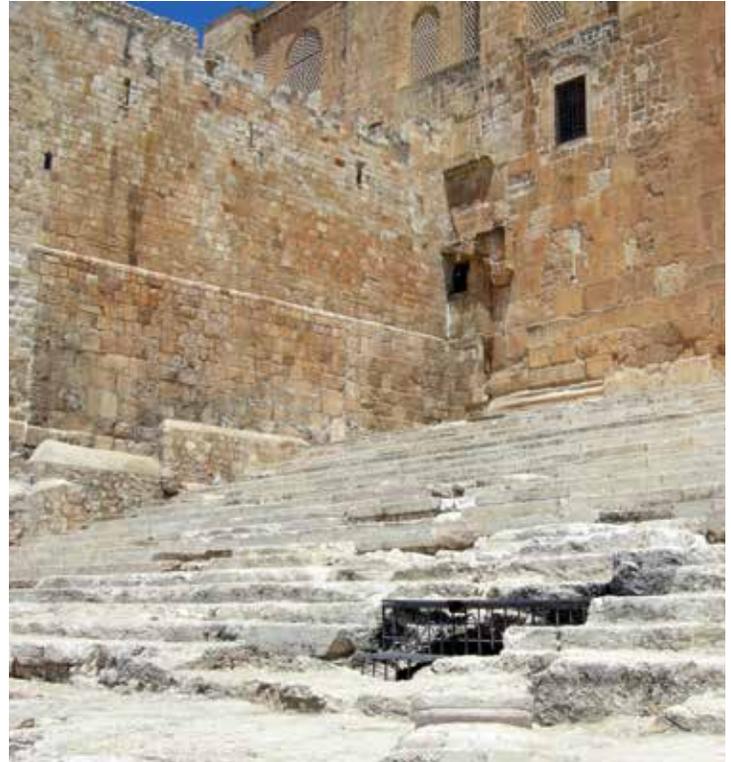
In Romans 11:13–18, Paul explained that Jesus Christ was grafting these Gentiles (“branches”) into the spiritual house of Israel (the “root”). Remember, the word “Gentile” simply referred to *any* nation that was not of the twelve tribes of Jacob. Gentiles whom Paul would have encountered in the Roman Empire would have included Arabs, Germans, Persians, Ethiopians, Egyptians, Indians, Syrians and many other tribes and nations.

Together in the “Assembly of the Lord”

The Scripture is powerfully clear that if we have been brought near by God, if we are repentant, and if we have accepted Jesus Christ as our living Lord and Savior—resulting in our baptism and the laying on of hands for the receipt of God’s Spirit—then we are “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). Such individuals are in “the Assembly of the LORD”—the Church of God—regardless of their nationality. If we have been reconciled to God in one body through the cross (cf. Ephesians 2:16), then, as converted Christians, we will be deeply repentant of our past carnality and self-will, and of breaking God’s law. As “new” men and women, we will be “renewed in the spirit of [our] mind” (Ephesians 4:22–23), seeking to have our thoughts and our very life transformed through Jesus Christ living in us through the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:2).

Speaking of the need to deeply appreciate Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and how He works in those whom He is reconciling, Dr. Roderick Meredith warned that “as converted Christians, we should have the *continuing realization* of the **awfulness** of sin. Otherwise, it may be **too easy** to take Christ for granted and slip right back into sin. We need to realize our **need** for the shedding of *blood* to cover our sins, and realize that it had to be the shed blood of the very Son of God who created us and whose life is worth more than all of ours put together!” (“What Does Christ’s Death Mean to YOU?,” September–October 2006, *Living Church News*). Through this calling, our acceptance of Jesus Christ as our living Lord, our repentance from sin and our submission to God’s law, converted Christians—whether Jew or Gentile—have peace and reconciliation as “one body” (Ephesians 2:16).

When Christ “[broke] down the middle wall of separation,” He allowed for the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile to each other, leaving no room for animosity or the sin of racism. Most importantly, He allowed for all who repent and become converted to be reconciled to Him (Acts 2:27–39).



Remnants of the 1st century Stairs of Ascent, discovered by archaeologist Benjamin Mazar, to the entrance of the Temple Courtyard. Pilgrims coming to make sacrifices at the Temple would have entered and exited by this stairway.

This promise is not only for God’s Church now. During the reign of Christ, when “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14), God will bring all nations into peace and reconciliation with each other and with Him. Israel will be settled in its land (cf. Ezekiel 48), and God will again establish Israel to be an example to all the nations. Then, Israel and *all the nations* will learn to obey God in righteousness and in peace (Zechariah 14:16). God will permit no ordinances that cause animosity between the nations in the Millennium! As the Apostle Peter taught, “In truth I perceive that *God shows no partiality*. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him” (Acts 10:34–35).

We are thankful for the peace and reconciliation of Ephesians 2:14—thankful that He has broken down the middle wall of separation and that we have been brought near through His blood. The body of Christ includes many people from different nationalities, but we are *one spiritual body*. In the Church, if we are converted Christians, then we not only individually have a *personal relationship* with Jesus Christ and the Father, but all of us together also share the *same hope and calling*. If we are repentant, converted Christians, then, through Jesus Christ living in us, our hope is to become “one” *forever* with the Father and Jesus Christ at the resurrection (John 17:20–22). This is the ultimate peace and reconciliation! (LW)



Young and Single: A Season of Preparation

By **Scott D. Winnail**

The life season of singleness is unique and filled with both challenge and opportunity. Being young and single can be exciting! Singles typically have more free time, energy, money and flexibility than they will have later in life. However, this special season of life can be easily squandered. The Apostle Paul gave brethren in the church at Ephesus timeless advice: “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:15–16). Paul encouraged the brethren to *seriously consider* their lives and their futures and to *maximize* the time with which they were blessed. In a similar way, Jesus Christ observed, “I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work” (John 9:4). Christ knew His earthly ministry would be short-lived and He committed Himself to maximizing the opportunity while He had it!

How about you? Those in the season of life known as “singleness” need the same determined focus. Learning to be content in this season is essential (Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:8), but it is just as important to *use this time* to prepare thoughtfully for future seasons of life!

While we would not agree with everything he wrote, author Joshua Harris made an insightful observation about the season of being young and single in his 1997 book, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*:

For a moment, take stock of your current attitude. Are you so caught up in dreaming of marriage that you're

neglecting your present responsibilities as a son, daughter, brother, sister, or friend? Or are you redeeming the time, fulfilling those responsibilities God has given you today?

We cannot ignore our current responsibilities and expect to magically gain the strength of character and virtue that will make us good husbands and wives. If we aren't faithful and growing in the relationships we have now, we won't be prepared to pursue faithfulness and growth in marriage later.

Most of us would like God to “give us the hand of *His* daughter” to be our wife, or “give us the hand of *His* son” to be our husband. So, what are we willing to do to make ourselves worthy of that kind of gift? Are we preparing well so that God will be pleased to give us His son or daughter in marriage?

This article focuses on the season of being a younger single. However, we will discuss many principles that singles of all ages can apply. The key is to use the season of singleness to prepare wisely for the next seasons in life. Those who successfully do this will be putting themselves in a position to be blessed with an abundant future! Let us look at several areas of preparation that young singles should be focusing on.

Spiritual Preparation

How many young singles long to be married and experience the blessing of children? Husbands, wives, fathers and mothers fill powerful spiritual roles! Yet, one cannot become a spiritual leader without preparation. God calls men to be spiritual leaders in their families, and He expects wives not only to be

spiritual “iron” that can sharpen their husbands (Proverbs 27:17), but also to lead children spiritually.

To grow spiritually in this season of singleness requires “counting the cost” (Luke 14:28) and considering where one desires to be one year from now, five years from now, and even ten years from now. Next consider: What must be done to attain these goals? A strong foundation is best laid early in life in order to achieve godly goals later on—not just, say, a career a man can use to support his family, but even more importantly, the goals of building a strong marriage and family, and, ultimately, the goal of entry into God’s Kingdom. Focusing on establishing a career, marriage and family while *not* focusing on developing an intimate relationship with God and Jesus Christ is putting the proverbial “cart before the horse”—it is getting one’s priorities *backwards*. Time should be taken to *prepare* for our future **spiritual roles** as husband and wife, and father and mother, *before* those roles are undertaken. Saying “I do” may put a person into a position of spiritual leadership, but it does not automatically make one a successful spiritual leader. These roles need to be developed, and the season of singleness is the best time to do it!

How should singles prepare spiritually for their future roles and responsibilities? The use of spiritual tools should be practiced and become growing habits. Godly singles should make **prayer** more than just an “every morning” or “every evening” activity, but a part of their life throughout the day. We should seek to make **daily Bible study** meaningful and more than simply reading “a proverb a day.” (This action is excellent, but insufficient by itself for real spiritual growth.) Spending extra time, perhaps on the Sabbath or when fasting, to do deeper study into many different biblical and Christian living topics is also key. Regularly studying Church literature and reviewing recorded sermons and other educational tools the Church provides will add greater spiritual depth and focus, essential for true spiritual leadership in the family and workplace. Singles will do well to learn to **meditate** on God’s way of life and His principles—not in the Eastern mystical sense, but by thinking about the things they have read and learned. Such times of meditation can be used to help plan for the future. And singles will grow by learning to use the tool of **regular fasting** to draw closer to God, grow in humility, and allow Christ to more fully live *in* them (Galatians 2:20). Experience has taught the Church that these four tools are powerful and essential aids to spiritual growth.

By redeeming the time spiritually, singles begin to lay a foundation for successful preparation in all other areas of life.

So how should singles prepare spiritually
for their future roles and responsibilities?
**The use of spiritual tools should be
practiced and become growing habits.**

Career Preparation and Skill Development

Along with spiritual preparation, young singles should also use this season for job and career preparations or developing skills that will benefit them in the future. Too many of today’s youth squander this time by focusing too much on aimless pursuits and entertainment. Sadly, this frequently results in frustration, as individuals reach their late 20s and early 30s and have little to show for it.

Wise King Solomon admonished his son, “Put your outdoor work in order and get your fields ready; after that, build your house” (Proverbs 24:27, *New International Version*). God designed marriage and family to be a blessing for men and women. However, He also instructs us to do our part to prepare for these blessings *before* we take them on. Solomon also “learned from the ant”

that we should work hard in our current season of life so we will be well equipped for the next season we hope to enter (Proverbs 6:6–8). So, how can young singles prepare in the areas of job and career? Here are a few ideas:

- **Obtain your training and education now!** A wise person develops the character to work hard *early in life* in order to position himself or herself for a better future. Putting off training or education always puts greater stress on marriage and family. Position yourself for your future while you are young! Men should remember that an income that sustains you as a single is often insufficient to support a wife and family.
- **Men: Prepare for work that allows you to support a wife and family.** By the time singles today marry and have school-age children, public schools may be so morally corrupt that true Christians will not want to place their children (*God’s children!*) in them. Men should prepare for work that will allow them to support a family so their wives are free to be homemakers (Titus 2:5) and to care for children at home.
- **Ladies: Develop skills you will need, both before and after marriage.** Consider training that not only could put you in a job you enjoy now, if needed, but also will help prepare you for your future roles as wife and mother—running your home’s affairs and also caring for and educating your future children.
- **Examine possible jobs and careers from the perspective of their compatibility with God’s way of life.** Not

all job and career opportunities reflect the principles of God's Kingdom.

- **Consider taking a career/aptitude test online** (many are free) and use it to help you learn more about what you are “good at” and the types of jobs that you might want to consider.

One should use the season of singleness to prepare wisely for the next seasons in life. **Those who successfully do this will be putting themselves in a position to be blessed with an abundant future!**

Thoughtful, purposeful job and career training and skills development is important and should begin early. The longer it is delayed, the less prepared singles will be for their next season of life. Remember, also, that it is never too late to pursue further training or education.

Husband and Wife Preparation

So far we have discussed two ways to prepare for future *life seasons* of marriage and family. But what about preparing for the *roles* of husband and wife, themselves? The season of singleness is a crucial time to prepare for these roles. Singles should be developing character traits that are vital to a godly marriage. Here are several actions to begin pursuing that will help you spiritually prepare for marriage:

- **Produce godly fruit.** Review Galatians 5:19–23 and examine yourself in light of both the “works of the flesh” and the “fruit of God’s spirit.” Christians strive to *put off* carnal works and *produce more* of the fruit of God’s Spirit. The more godly character traits we bring into marriage and family, the happier and more fulfilled we and our loved ones will be.
- **Grow in humility and teachability.** Proverbs is full of admonitions to the wise to seek counsel. Humble, teachable people understand their own limitations and seek advice from those who already have attained the success and qualities they themselves wish to develop.
- **Build godly habits.** As discussed earlier, regular prayer, Bible study, meditation and fasting are vital habits to build. In order to become the godly husband or wife we long to be, these spiritual tools are a “must” to develop.

- **Learn to communicate.** One of the biggest reasons for marriage frustration and failure is ineffective communication. Learning to *listen* well and communicate clearly is vital for marital success. Singles should learn to communicate well so that this skill is *brought into* marriage and family.

In addition to these godly actions, singles should spend time *studying* their future roles! Proverbs reminds us that wisdom is all around us *if* we are willing to make the effort to seek it (Proverbs 1:20). We also know that wise people foresee evil and hide from it—or learn how to avoid it (Proverbs 22:3). Studying marriage and family and learning how to prepare for them will help us be successful when finally blessed with that season of life. Below are several suggestions to help prepare for the season of marriage and the roles of husband and wife:

- **Read and study *God’s Plan for Happy Marriage*.** This booklet briefly outlines key actions husbands and wives need to take to make their marriages happy and truly godly.
- **Read and review Church articles and sermons** addressed to husbands and wives.
- **Interview “congregational experts.”** Find husbands and wives in your local congregation who set the example of a man or woman of God. Ask them for advice about how you can prepare to be a truly godly husband or wife and what you can be doing now!
- **Obtain and read some helpful books.** Of course, your Bible is a *wonderful* book that has both advice and examples concerning godly dating and marriage. Many have found benefit from books such as William Harley’s *His Needs, Her Needs*. Consider asking your local ministers for books or resources they might recommend for you.

While we are always learning how to do better, even after marriage, we should invest ourselves in planning for the roles of husband and wife *before* marriage. It also helps show God you are working to be *ready* to receive the hand of His son or daughter.

Father and Mother Preparation

Just as singles should begin working to develop the traits of a godly husband or wife before marriage, so, too, should they be developing the traits they will need as godly parents. When we realize that the role of parents is to rear God’s own children (Malachi 2:15), the level of responsibility held by parents takes on a new level of seriousness.

YOUNG AND SINGLE continues on page 20

The Challenge of Athens



By **Wallace G. Smith**

The world is not what it once was. For decades, God’s Church has preached the Gospel of His Kingdom to a culture that—to a great degree—at least *respected* the Bible. That is changing quickly.

Within the United States, those who do not identify with any particular religion are not only increasing, but also growing more secular. Where once we could assume that our audience largely had a basic familiarity with the Bible, we can assume no longer. Younger generations are raised believing that only the ignorant or “religious zealots” question evolution, same-sex “marriage” holds the same moral status as traditional marriage, and the Bible is simply an old book that *may* offer some good advice, but also most certainly contains falsehood.

In 2016, the Barna Group’s David Kinnaman summarized the results of research concerning American attitudes about the Bible. “With each passing year, the percent of Americans who believe that the Bible is ‘just another book written by men’ increases,” he wrote. “So too do the perceptions that the Bible is actually harmful and that people who live by its principles are religious extremists.” Other countries are even more skeptical than the United States.

While our usual *Tomorrow’s World* audience remains Bible-friendly, we increasingly preach the Gospel to individuals who see Jesus Christ’s teachings and the God of the Bible as utterly foreign to their experience—and often offensive.

These accelerating cultural changes represent a great challenge to God’s Work, today. For reasons that will become clear, I have come to call this *the challenge of Athens*. This article’s goal is to explain that challenge and look at a key biblical example of how to meet it. My hope is that God’s people will appeal that much more fervently in their prayers that He guide and empower His Work to reach a culture from which He is increasingly estranged.

Fundamental Differences

At the heart of much of our preaching is the truth that the Bible does not say many of the things people believe it says! This is part of why our telecast often encourages viewers to search their Bibles to verify what we say—in order to see that our teachings are those of Jesus Christ and His Apostles, recorded in Scripture. When someone believes that the Bible is God’s word and is shown, for example, that it teaches Saturday as the Sabbath and not Sunday, it can be convicting. For many of us reading this article, that was how God first grabbed our attention.

But what of someone younger, who sees the Bible as no more credible than the Quran or ancient myths? Reactions may vary. Such an individual might be so repulsed by religion in general that he doesn’t hear the message: *Wasn’t religion at the root of the September 11 attacks? Isn’t Christianity anti-science? Isn’t the Bible why my gay friend is bullied?* Such ideas are, at best, over-generalizations, and at worst, utterly wrong. But for some, these are “truths” that culture has ingrained in their minds.

In an odd twist, perhaps such a one will *agree* that mainstream Christians are wrong about Sunday-keeping but will *also* consider this understanding personally irrelevant. He is not a Christian himself, so why should his behavior change? If anything, he may use this information only to poke fun at his Christian friends for getting their own religion wrong!

If such individuals differ so fundamentally from the more Bible-friendly (or at least not *anti*-Bible) culture in which the Work has blossomed in decades past, can we even hope to reach them? Should we write them off—concluding that, since the end is coming, it makes sense that fewer will listen, and we shouldn't worry about it? Or should we decide that, since the Father does the calling (John 6:44, 65), we don't have to concern ourselves about how people of this growing culture understand our message? Will God simply “take care of it” while we keep doing everything the way we've always done?

We don't have to guess the answers. God has recorded examples of how He inspired His early Church to approach these questions—examples that teach us about our responsibility as stewards of His message and inform us about the approach we should take today.

“All Things to All Men”

The Apostle Paul's work was similar to our modern work in many ways. Though he was commissioned to reach the “uncircumcised” (Galatians 2:7–9), he strove to preach God's truth to all he met. His efforts are recorded for us in detail, as is his approach to reaching those of differing cultures and backgrounds. He describes that approach in 1 Corinthians 9:19–22.

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

This passage is easy to misunderstand, but Paul does not say that he became *lawless* to those without the law. He carefully explains that he remained under God's law as a Christian should. He took advantage of the *lawful* liberty he possessed under Christ to relate to Gentiles, just as he took advantage of his knowledge of the Old Covenant, including those parts no longer applicable to Christians, to relate to fellow Jews.

One obvious takeaway from this passage is that Paul did not use “God does the calling” as an excuse to do less than his

absolute best as a tool in God's hands for reaching the world. He certainly believed that the Father must call people to Christ—one of the plainest references to this doctrine comes from his own words in 1 Corinthians 1:26–29. Yet he still believed it was his responsibility to do all within his power to relate to his audience in a godly and lawful way, acknowledging their own perspectives and backgrounds in order to present God's truth to them as effectively as possible.

And the Bible goes beyond revealing that Paul strove to be “all things to all men.” Through Luke's pen, God shows us just *how* Paul practiced that principle. We see this by comparing—and contrasting—what is recorded in Acts 13 and 17.

Paul in the Synagogue of Antioch

Consider the record in Acts 13 of Paul's preaching in Antioch in Pisidia. As he visited the synagogue there, its rulers asked if he had anything to say to the assembled attendees. Of course, Paul did! He began:

Men of Israel, and you who fear God, listen: The God of this people Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He brought them out of it. Now for a time of about forty years He put up with their ways in the wilderness (vv. 16–18).

Please read verses 16 through 41 yourself. Addressing himself to both the Jewish listeners and to the “God-fearers”—Gentiles in the synagogue who had accepted Israel's God (“devout proselytes,” v. 43)—Paul begins by recounting the history of Israel, from their time in Egypt to the time of David (vv. 16–22). He reminds them of the promise of a Messiah to come through David's line and tells them that Jesus fulfills that promise, having been heralded by John the Baptist (vv. 23–25).

Paul then tells these “sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God” that they are now receiving the word of salvation they have awaited, explaining to them the events that have taken place in Jerusalem, including Jesus' condemnation, execution, and resurrection—events to which many witnesses could attest (vv. 26–31). Paul then anchors his claims in the Old Testament, pointing to Jesus as the fulfillment of Messianic prophecies of a future king, through whom forgiveness of sins is now available (vv. 32–39). Finally, he reminds them of prophetic warnings concerning those who do not believe God's Work when it happens in their time (vv. 40–41).

Paul at the Areopagus in Athens

Now consider Acts 17. Again, it is helpful to read the entire account yourself, in Acts 17:18–34, but we note here some highlights.

We find Paul in very different circumstances. In the Greek city of Athens, the Apostle spoke in the local synagogues with the Jews and “Gentile worshipers” of God, just as he had done in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 17:17). However, he also spoke daily in the marketplace, where he would have encountered individuals of diverse backgrounds and cultures. There, he attracted attention from important men.

Verse 18 says that some Athenians dismissed him as a “babbler,” while others noted that he seemed to preach “foreign gods.” This latter comment had the potential to be serious, as it was anciently illegal in Athens to preach gods the city did not officially recognize. One accusation against the philosopher Socrates, resulting in his execution in 399BC, was that he introduced new gods into Athens.

As a result, Paul was taken to the Areopagus, atop “Mars Hill.” This was an important Athenian court that heard cases related to very serious crimes, such as homicide and sedition (*The Law in Classical Athens*, Douglas M. MacDowell, pp. 27–28). There is no need to conclude that Paul was on trial, but the history of the Areopagus proves that this was an important audience of prominent individuals. As Paul speaks to those assembled, his “all things to all men” approach is brilliantly put into action.

First, Paul mentions to the council that he has observed how “religious” Athens is, noting the idols and places of worship throughout the city, including an altar dedicated “To the Unknown God” (vv. 22–23). Then—with, perhaps, inspired savvy—he argues that he is, in a sense, not preaching a “foreign” god in Athens, for he only preaches this “Unknown God” they already acknowledge: “Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you” (v. 23).

Paul then argues that the God who created the universe is too great to dwell in temples of man’s design or be captured in the worshipped idols of man’s creation (vv. 24–25). He highlights that this God created all men from the same blood (v. 26) and placed the different peoples in appointed places on earth to seek Him (v. 27). He then quotes two Gentile poets, with whom Athenians would be familiar, stating, “for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, ‘For we are also His offspring’” (v. 28).

The first of those quotes matches the writings of the ancient poet Epimenides of Cnossos, an honored figure in Athenian history. In one of his poems, Epimenides pictures King Monos of Crete speaking to the god Zeus and saying,

*They fashioned a tomb for you, holy and high one,
Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies.
But you are not dead: you live and abide forever,
For in you we live and move and have our being.*

Paul quotes this last line to the Athenians, though students of the Bible might also recognize the second line, which Paul

quotes to Titus, citing it as having been said by “one of them [a Cretan], a prophet of their own” (Titus 1:12).

The latter quote Paul provides from “some of [their] own poets” has been identified as one from Aratus, who had been a popular poet and philosophy student in Athens three to four centuries earlier. In Aratus’ work *Phenomena*, he writes, “Everywhere everyone is indebted to Zeus. *For we are indeed his offspring....*”

Having established—using their own poets—that the Athenians recognize their utter dependence on a universal Creator, of whom they are offspring, Paul points out the folly of thinking that a man-made idol—“gold or silver or stone”—can capture the “Divine Nature” of that Creator (v. 29). He then says that God, in His mercy, has overlooked such sin but now commands all the world to repent, since He is bringing judgment through His chosen Man—validating this by raising that Man from the dead (vv. 30–31).

At the mention of Christ’s resurrection, “some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter’” (v. 32).

The Bible records nothing about a great “Church of God in Athens.” Part of what originally provoked Paul was how “given over” the city was to idolatry (v. 16), and Luke testifies that the men of Athens and those of other nations who lived there were consumed with a profitless curiosity about new ideas (v. 21). In a sense, they met the description Paul gives elsewhere of individuals who are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). Yet, even in Athens, some *did* believe (Acts 17:34).

Two Audiences, Two Approaches, One Message

Looking at Paul’s evangelism in Antioch and Athens, we see some things in common. For instance, in both cities the Apostle preached a relevant *biblical* truth to his audience.

To the Jews and Gentile proselytes in Antioch, he ultimately sought to convince them that the prophesied Messiah had come, and judgment would ultimately strike those refusing to follow Him. To the Gentile Greeks of Athens, he taught that God was not to be worshipped with idols, and that He had appointed One to judge the world in the future for such sins. Clearly, both messages are rooted in biblical truth, and God’s Church preaches both to this day.

Yet, when we contrast the two accounts, we find that there are also important *differences*, and these are extremely instructive.

In Acts 13, Paul preaches to his fellow Jews and to Gentiles who had adopted the Jewish religion and beliefs. He uses touchstones of their culture that would resonate with them: Israel’s history, biblical prophecies they have heard all their lives, and prophets with whom they are familiar.

But in his address at the Areopagus in Acts 17, Paul’s message, while truly biblical, is significantly different. He does

not quote a single passage of Scripture—how many on the Areopagus would have known those scriptures anyway? God’s commandment against idolatry is the heart of his message to the Athenians, yet he does not quote Exodus 20. Instead, he appeals to their faculties of reason about *why* the true God would not want such worship, and when he quotes sources, he carefully uses their *own* poets to illustrate his points. He speaks to them not with Jewish culture or his own, but with *their* culture—and after referring to one of their own idols to begin his speech!

Was he watering things down? Far from it! Recall Acts 17:16. Paul saw that Athens was “given over to idols,” was provoked in his spirit, and he *cried aloud and spared not!* What boldness does it take to walk into a country devoted to idols and make the spearpoint of your message an *attack* on idolatry—all while on trial? Boldness of the highest order!

Paul did not dismiss the Greeks as unreachable. He did not conclude, “If God’s calling them, they will understand no matter what I say,” and then approach them just as he did those in Antioch. Rather, he sought to be “all things to all men” and made a powerful effort to reach them in the most effective way he could.

Not many responded—but some did. Acts 17:34 reveals that Dionysius the Areopagite (possibly one of the very judges examining him) and a woman named Damaris, along with several others, believed what they heard. When they would have asked where a Jewish “babbler” like Paul learned such amazing truths that had escaped even the wisest Athenians, the stage would have been set for him to teach the real source of wisdom—not human philosophies, but *God’s revealed word*.

Paul’s example is relevant in ways that many could not have foreseen even 20 years ago. Whatever biblical literacy is left in Western culture, such remnants are evaporating in the heat of radical secularism and an actively cultivated culture of godlessness. Some have even noticed that our culture, once described as “post-Christian,” is increasingly better described as “pre-Christian”—so removed from biblical principles that it is as if they were never a part of the society at all.

Meeting the Challenge of Athens

Our world is no longer predisposed to respect the Bible. We face one in which biblical concepts and truths need to be fought for differently. God does not give permission to “write off” anyone. Paul did not see the heathen, idolatrous people of Greece and dismiss them as “unreachable.” He labored to meet the challenge of Athens. We must, as well.

In his address at the Areopagus in Acts 17, Paul’s message is truly biblical, but it is significantly different. He does not quote a single passage of Scripture—**how many on the Areopagus would have known those scriptures anyway?**

We are learning. Most *Tomorrow’s World* efforts focus on our religious audience, and this is as it should be. That audience is still strong. But we have also begun explor-

ing ways to reach different audiences. For example, the Canadian-produced version of *Tomorrow’s World* is more geared toward secular individuals, as the “challenge of Athens” in Canada is very real. Canada’s sharp, professional *Tomorrow’s World Viewpoint* series of online videos is also beginning to

make a dent in different demographics we have not previously reached as successfully, and our first few “whiteboard” videos—introducing viewers to biblical topics in a fast-paced and visually interesting manner—have shown great promise.

We are also developing new materials that approach popular topics from different angles and perspectives, seeking not only to teach what the Bible says, but also to defend those teachings in new ways. It is our hope that God can use these efforts to reach those who have never considered His word before.

But we still have much to learn.

The Goal Never Changes

Our commission remains: Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom of God to all nations. In a world where biblical literacy and the remnants of Judeo-Christian culture are vanishing, the challenge of effectively reaching that world is real. The cultural values and touchstones of previous generations are not those of upcoming generations. It is not simply a matter of making sure we are on the Internet or social media. Regardless of the means of delivery, the message Paul delivered in Antioch would not have worked in Athens. Athenian culture was too different, and much of what resonated with the Jews and proselytes of Antioch would have meant nothing to Dionysius the Areopagite.

We could choose to be lazy and ignore the challenge—just continuing to do what is comfortable and familiar without venturing into new territory. But do we want God to call people *despite* our efforts or *through* them? How deeply do we long to hear the returning Christ say, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (Matthew 25:21)?

Mr. Gerald Weston has said that if the world is going to be reached, God will have to reach it. Our desire is simply to be the best tools we can be in our Father’s hands, just as the Apostle Paul sought to be. Let us make sure that, when we see Paul in the resurrection, we can truthfully tell him that we sought with all our strength to be such tools as well. To the best of our ability, let us rise to meet the challenge of Athens. (LW)

Woman to Woman

To Be Discreet

By **Glory Talbott**

Discretion is one of the attributes we see in Titus 2:5. Older women are “to be discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed.” And if older women are admonished to be discreet, we younger or middle-aged women should seek that goal, as well. As a woman now in my forties, I have noticed that this important attribute is taking years to develop. It has not come naturally for me, being from a family that valued openness almost to a fault. I was the child of a military family and we moved a lot. During some of my younger years, living far from where our family had roots, I picked up the notion that if you “held back” in any way, you were hiding something. To be “aloof” and private made you seem terribly suspicious.

While being open can be a good thing, being *too* open is not. You can overload people with details and a mouthful of unnecessary words. Proverbs 10:19 tells us, “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise.” Given my own proclivities, this scripture always made me cringe. But knowing that, as Christians, we have to take every scripture into account, without adding or taking away (Deuteronomy 12:32), I had to consider this in more depth.

When I first read Paul’s instruction “to be discreet,” I had no idea what it meant. Yet, it is clearly something God wants me to incorporate into my womanhood, so I needed to find out. I looked it up, and the definition is instructive. My dictionary defines “discreet” as “having or showing discernment or good judgment in conduct and especially in speech.” Since then, I have meditated on what it means to be discreet and asked myself, “How can I internalize this?”

I know that true discernment comes from the Holy Spirit. Without God’s help, proper discernment can be overcome by faulty and unguided human reasoning. Since discernment is a basis for true discretion, being discreet requires a close relationship with God, and being intimately aware of His word and instruction is vital. Prayer, fasting, Bible study and meditation are the tools we need to build that relationship

with our Father and the Scripture. Good judgment in conduct and speech, as the dictionary defines, takes God’s help, experience, and self-control.

With that as our foundation, then, we need to follow through in our actions. Discretion means practicing good judgment in conduct, and the emphasis on showing such judgment in our speech means we need to be particularly careful and thoughtful concerning the things we choose to *say*.

Principles of Discretion

There are a few things I have learned over the years on this journey to become more discreet—and I am still learning. Having always valued an outsized degree of openness—eager to provide an excess of details and information—I know I can go overboard very easily. But thinking carefully about *what we say* and *how we say it* is a skill we all can learn. Here are three principles I have found very helpful.

1. Say It Once

This first point sounds very simple, but it is also very helpful: When you have something to say, learn to simply say it *once*. My husband noticed that I would repeat myself often—not just to him, but to everyone. If someone disagreed with me or did not respond, or the person did not seem open to what I was saying, I would often repeat myself. “It is unnecessary to repeat yourself,” my husband kindly told me. Say it once. We have to remember that others don’t have to always agree with us, and respecting them means respecting their right to their own opinions and conclusions. Getting louder about a point or repeating it will not make any real impact—at least not the kind we want to make. And it certainly isn’t the model of biblical discretion.

2. Less Is More

Details overwhelm people. It is helpful to re-evaluate just how many details we want to communicate, because sometimes “less is more.”

Simplifying and saying just what is needed is often much more effective and helpful than adding loads of details that our listeners often don’t need—and possibly don’t want. Besides, sometimes we can later deeply regret saying something that would have been better left unsaid.

Think carefully about what information you want to provide. Say just enough, and always be especially careful with information *about* other people. Just because they shared something with you, doesn't automatically mean that they want it to be repeated to others. The best way to be certain about whether something shared with you should be repeated is to simply *ask them* if it is okay to share. For instance, if your best friend has told you that her dog is deathly ill, and you have another friend who is a veterinarian, practicing discretion might mean simply asking the first friend if it is OK to share. It's possible that she was simply opening up to you and doesn't want extra help. Perhaps she was simply seeking sympathy.

3. Take It to God

It is important to communicate and build relationships, and we all need to share, grow and learn from each other. But we need to make sure that we take issues to God first. If you feel like you are going to burst and need someone to talk to, *He* is the listening ear who thinks of your prayers like sweet incense (Psalm 141:2).

Jesus Christ agreed to give His life for you before you were even born (Revelation 13:8), and there is no one who wants more to hear from you. He experienced temptations as we do (Hebrews 4:15). He truly understands and cares. If the house is a mess, the kids are still busy making that mess, and your world seems turned upside with financial pressures and the modern stress of a hectic life—it is crucial to stop, kneel,



and talk to God. If we take it to Him first, we can speak more confidently and discreetly with others, knowing that even if we don't share *everything* with someone else, we've shared it with the One with whom we *can* share everything. In talking to God first, we can in turn be stronger in conversation for someone else to lean upon.

In this frenzied world and our many communications, let us remember discretion. It does take more effort to think things through a little more and to practice self-control with our words. We should be gracious and open, while still leaving some matters private. All things should be carefully considered, but the end result is worth the effort! Let our speech reflect the praise of Proverbs 25:11, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." ^{LN}

TOMORROW'S WORLD Upcoming Telecasts

July 12-18	Understanding Bible Mysteries
July 19-25	You Can Be Healed
July 26-August 1	The Truth About the Rapture
August 2-8	The Bible: Fact or Fiction?
August 9-15	Future Shocks
August 16-22	Descending into Chaos
August 23-29	Prayers and Promises
August 30-September 5	Why Christmas?

Schedule subject to change | For stations and times, check the Television Log on page 34 of your *Tomorrow's World* magazine.

ORDINATIONS

Mr. Naas De Jager was ordained an elder on the First Day of Unleavened Bread by Presiding Evangelist Gerald Weston and Pastor Jonathan McNair. Mr. DeJager serves in the Tannersville, Pennsylvania congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Randy (Dawn) Oxedine were ordained deacon and deaconess on the Last Day of Unleavened Bread

by Area Pastor Glen Harrison and elders Curtis Lambright, Chip Wheelahan, Ray Joffrion and Mickey Mayeaux. Mr. and Mrs. Oxedine serve in the Lafayette, Louisiana congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Nyron (Theresa) Pringle were ordained deacon and deaconess on the First Day of Unleavened Bread by Presiding Evangelist Gerald

Weston and Pastor Jonathan McNair. Mr. and Mrs. Pringle serve in the Plainview, New York congregation.

Mr. Michael Weldon was ordained a deacon on the First Day of Unleavened Bread by Presiding Evangelist Gerald Weston and Pastor Jonathan McNair. Mr. Weldon serves in the Plainview, New York congregation.

Weddings & Anniversaries

Mr. Stephen Mew and **Miss Rebecca Berardo** were united in marriage on March 18 at the historic Woodlands of Marburg. Brisbane Pastor Dayrell Tanner conducted the ceremony. Afterward, the newlyweds and wedding guests celebrated the happy occasion at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Steve Gibson, enjoying an informal reception, amusing speeches,

lawn games and dancing on a lovely autumn day. Mr. and Mrs. Mew attend the Brisbane, Australia congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Harry (Susan) Nagtegaal, of the London, Ontario congregation, celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on May 4. The congregation surprised them after services on the Sabbath with a special cake and a card signed by the brethren. Mr. and Mrs. Nagtegaal have two daughters and five grandchildren.

Births

Mr. and Mrs. Moses (Margaret) Asingya, of the Fort Portal, Western Uganda congregation, announce with much pleasure the birth of their fourth child, **Jasmine Naomi Biira**. Jasmine was born April 24, weighing 3,200 grams and measuring 52 centimeters. Brothers Augustine and Henry and sister Hannah are overjoyed to have a baby sister, and both mother and baby are doing well.

In Loving Memory

Mrs. Muriel Blick, from the Palmerston North, New Zealand congregation, died March 16. She will be remembered for her many decades of faithfulness to the Truth and her bright and warm smile, and she will be greatly missed.

Mr. Ron Brooks, 61, of the Houston, Texas congregation, died on April 19. He was a devoted and loyal member of God's Church, ordained as a deacon in 2016. He truly loved God's people and was very zealous for the Work of God. He is survived by his wife Debbie, his parents, two sons and two daughters, grandchildren, as well as brothers and sisters, and numerous other relatives, brethren and friends. Mr. Brooks is tremendously missed by all who knew and loved him.

Ms. Shirley Lucille Brown, 82, of the Temple, Texas congregation, died at her residence on June 17, after a short battle with cancer. Mrs. Brown came into contact with God's Church in the mid-1960s and was baptized in February of 1970. She loved reading and studying God's word, traveling to His Holy Days and Feasts, and being with God's people every Sabbath. She greatly looked forward to the Kingdom of God and was a faithful Christian until her death. She is survived by two sons, Morris and Wade, one daughter, Rebecca Ruppenthal, and seven grandchildren. Her memorial service was conducted by her son, Mr. Wade Brown, an Elder serving in the Temple, Texas congregation.

Mr. Robert Coutts, 89, of the Grande Prairie, Alberta congregation, died peacefully with his family at his side on

We want to hear more about the happy milestones in the lives of our brethren. If your family has had a birth, marriage or major anniversary, please ask your local pastor to send word to the *Living Church News*, PO Box 3810, Charlotte, NC 28227-8010 (or to send e-mail to lcn@lcn.org).

March 14. He discovered the Church of God when he encountered issues of *The Plain Truth* in a pile of magazines he was burning. With his wife, he read the material and they started attending services. He was baptized in 1978 and ordained a deacon in 1994. During his long life he worked as a logger, a farmer and a pilot. Predeceased by his wife Edith in 2002, he is survived by seven children, nine grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, one sister and some nieces. Mr. Coutts' Church family will also miss him and his great sense of humor. One of his daughters, Carol, wrote of him: "A true gentleman, great father, grandfather, and awesome friend." That is a good testimony.

Mrs. Jessie Lucas Griffin, 80, of the Ocean Springs, Mississippi congregation, died on April 25. She is survived by her husband James, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren, as well as siblings, nieces, nephews, other relatives and many friends. Mrs. Griffin greatly loved and appreciated her family. She was baptized in 2008.

Mr. Garnet Hay, 64, lost his long battle with cancer on April 10. Born in New Brunswick, he spent most of his life in British Columbia and Alberta. Mr. Hay's quest to understand things eventually led him to a 2009 *Tomorrow's World* Presentation in Edmonton, where he was baptized two years later. With the support of his wife Marla, also a Church member, he continued steadfastly in the faith, in spite of many arduous trials, an example to the Edmonton congregation. Fondly remembered by his family for his love of mechanical things, motorcycles, trucking, nature, and gatherings with family and friends, he was always willing to lend a helping hand. Mr. Hay is greatly mourned by his wife, three daughters, three stepchildren, eleven grandchildren and a great-granddaughter. A memorial service was held on April 29, officiated by Mr. Stuart Wachowicz and assisted by Messrs. Lawrence Hartshorne and Lenard Hine.

Mr. Robert R. Keller, 92, of the Terre Haute, Indiana congregation, died peacefully on May 23. After serving in the United States Army, he worked mainly for the Detroit Diesel Allison company, retiring as a Maintenance Supervisor. Baptized in 1984, he long served as a pillar and faithful member of the Church. All who knew him will miss the dignity with which he faced trials, and the respect he showed to others. He often spoke of learning patience in his trials, and placed his hope in the resurrection and in the reality of God's coming Kingdom. He was preceded in death by his wife, eight siblings, two sons and one granddaughter, and is survived by his daughter, two sons, eight grandchildren and many

great-grandchildren and great-great grandchildren. Associate Pastor Yancy Taber officiated at his funeral.

Mr. Austin Robert Krulik, 22, of the Knox, Indiana congregation, loving father, husband, and son, died on May 29 of a congenital heart condition. On June 29, 2014, shortly after graduating from high school, he married the love of his life, Lindsey Smith. They were blessed with a beautiful baby daughter in 2016, and were both baptized in June 2017. They had recently purchased their first home and he had begun working at Knox Community High School. In addition to his wife and daughter, he is survived by his mother, Rachel Meadows (Mike); his father, Robert Krulik (Tammy); grandparents, Frank and Lois Krulik and Ralph and Darlene Sponaule; two brothers, Ethan Krulik and Brady Meadows, and many other relatives and friends. All will miss his infectious laugh and remember his love for outdoor activities. Associate Pastor Yancy Taber conducted his memorial service.

Mr. Clive Maurice, 85, of the Auckland, New Zealand congregation, died on March 2, after years of ill health. Mr. Maurice was always very generous to help others as he was able, and the Auckland brethren will miss his fine example of resilience and courage in the face of physical adversity.

Mr. Mickey John Mayeaux, 64, of the Lafayette, Louisiana congregation, died June 7. A respiratory therapist, he was deeply loved, respected and admired by many. Mr. Mayeaux was baptized in 1990, ordained a deacon in 2001, and as an elder in 2014. Besides serving God's people, Mr. Mayeaux and his wife loved to fish in their private pond. He is survived by his wife Clara Belle, a sister and a brother, and other relatives. He was predeceased by his parents and one brother. Area Pastor Glen Harrison conducted his memorial service.

Mrs. Shirlene McFadden, 81, died on April 30 at her home in Kensett, Arkansas. She is survived by Julian, her husband of 54 years, and by two sons, two daughters, two grandchildren and one great-grandchild. She was preceded in death by one son, one brother and two sisters. Mrs. McFadden was baptized in 1970 and was a dedicated member of God's Church. Though she lived quite a distance from Church services, she rarely missed being there with a big smile and encouraging words, even as her health declined. Area Pastor David Stiffler and Mr. Davy Crockett conducted her funeral service. Mrs. McFadden will be remembered for her dedication, sense of humor and love of the Truth and her brethren, and she will be greatly missed.

Mrs. Gwendoline Scott, 101, of the Glasgow, Scotland congregation, died on 27 March. She lived to see four descendant generations. Born in London, she married Percy

In Loving Memory continued...

Scott in 1939 and later they moved to Atlanta, Georgia. Both were called into the Church in the 1980s. After her husband's death in 2000, she moved to Scotland. Along with her daughter Christine, she quickly became a greatly loved and admired Christian soldier in the Glasgow congregation. She retained a sharp intellect until her death, and had a special place in the affections of the congregation. All who knew her will miss her cheerful countenance and good humor.

Mr. Robert Wagner, 49, of the Guelph, Ontario congregation, died peacefully at home with his family at his side on June 1, after struggling with cancer for a year and a half. Throughout the trial, he fought the good fight and never lost faith that God has an awe-

some plan for all. His fellow workers considered him the “salt of the earth” and he was a wonderful example of faith to his Church family. He is survived by his wife Debbie, one son and one daughter, and his mother. Mr. Wagner will be greatly missed by all who came into contact with his loving and caring nature.

Mrs. Jean Gbur Wash, 89, of the Pensacola, Florida congregation, died March 21. She was born in Pennsylvania and had lived in Pensacola for 18 years. She was an active member of a water aerobics class for many years and also did volunteer work. She loved to travel, and had visited all 50 states by her 80th birthday. Mrs. Wash also loved to read and discuss the Bible, and was a firm believer in living by every word of

God. She is survived by two daughters and their husbands, cousins in Pennsylvania and her Church family. She was baptized in 1961.

Mrs. Imogene Wilson, 90, of Concord, Arkansas, died on May 7. Mrs. Wilson was the last surviving of sixteen children. She was also preceded in death by her parents, her husband and one son. She is survived by three children, nine grandchildren and several great-grandchildren. Mrs. Wilson was baptized in 1987, and was a beloved member of the Church. She was very active into her old age, enjoying embroidery, sewing and gardening. Her great joy was attending services and fellowshiping with her brethren. Her funeral service was conducted by Mr. David Stiffler.

YOUNG AND SINGLE continued from page 11

Those who are wise take time to *study* how to answer (Proverbs 15:28) and how to respond in different, foreseeable situations. Here are some recommendations to help singles prepare for the all-important roles of father and mother:

- **Read *Successful Parenting: God's Way*.** One powerful principle in this booklet is to “create a godly culture in your home.” This is an action singles can begin to practice well before marriage!
- **Read Church literature and listen to sermons** about parenting and the roles of fathers and mothers.
- **Interview congregational experts** and ask for advice on how to prepare *now* to become a godly parent.
- **Obtain and read some helpful books.** Again, while they may be imperfect, there are many helpful books out there, such as Dr. James Dobson's series: *Bringing Up Boys*, *Bringing Up Girls*, *Dare to Discipline*, and *The Strong-Willed Child*. Ask your pastor and local ministry what books they might recommend.

Conclusion

Being single is a special and unique season of life. While some see singleness as only a season of fun—or perhaps frustration—those who are wise will also use this vital season for preparation and growth. God expects all of us to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), regardless of our stage in life.

While many worldly singles squander this special season and have little to show for it later on, godly singles will use it to lay an unshakable spiritual foundation. They will use this time to prepare wisely for jobs, careers, or skills that will help secure future success, contentment and peace. And they will use this time to study, prepare for and build the character traits and habits necessary to be a godly husband and father or wife and mother.

Now is the season for young singles and older singles alike to prepare for the next stage or season in life. Dedicated, godly preparation results in blessings and an abundant life. For those already working hard and using this season to prepare, keep up the good work! God will reward you. For those yet to start, do not waste any more time—get busy, apply yourself and use this season to prepare, so that you, too, can reap the rewards God longs to give you! (L)

The BRiC Weekend

Singles from across North America traveled to Charlotte, North Carolina, for another successful and inspiring BRiC Weekend! The acronym BRiC—“Building Relationships in Christ”—defines the main goal and focus in organizing and planning for this annual event. Within the scope of building relationships, this year’s BRiC Weekend theme was “Walking with God Together.”

The singles group in Charlotte has hosted this event for several years now, usually in the month of May. The weekend provides an opportunity for singles to come to Charlotte and hear inspiring messages, enjoy activities together and engage in quality fellowship. It is truly an uplifting occasion, where like-minded individuals spend time together. Whether new or veteran, young or old, those who come create, build and strengthen relationships within the spiritual body of Jesus Christ.

This year, more than 80 singles of all ages were in attendance, one of our largest groups yet! Besides brethren from across the U.S., there were several visitors from Canada and one visitor from the U.S. Virgin Islands. The weekend began Friday afternoon with a tour of the Headquarters facility. This first-hand look gave the group a chance to understand the different departments of the office and the operations and functions of God’s Church and Work. Afterward, we welcomed the Sabbath



Daniel being thrown to the lions in a game of Bible charades.



Mr. Mike DeSimone interviews the McNairs.

together, with a delicious taco buffet dinner that was followed by a Bible Study and group activity. The Bible Study, titled “The End of Men?,” focused on some of the role-reversal trends we see around us and how they fit into prophecy, and also explained what we can do individually to overcome society and fulfill the proper roles God intended for both men and women.

On Saturday, following an inspiring Sabbath service and fellowship over snacks, the singles attended “BRiC Talks.” Each BRiC Talk is a biblically-based message with format and delivery modeled after the popular TED Talk series. This style of presentation for discussing topics related to Christian living has been a crowd favorite over the past few years and is a great way to explore topics not typically presented in Bible Studies or sermons. Following the BRiC Talks, Mr. and Mrs. Rod McNair and Mr. and Mrs. Wallace Smith sat for brief interviews conducted by Mr. Mike DeSimone. The couples answered questions about their relationship experiences, adding a unique and helpful perspective as the audience heard from husband and wife together. These interviews of ministers and their wives provided even more spiritual food and helpful insight into godly relationships. Saturday evening ended with an Italian-themed progressive dinner and, after the Sabbath, a dance capped the day with music and entertainment.

On Sunday, we divided into seven teams and “raced” through uptown Charlotte, competing in the Uptown Challenge. At the beginning of the challenge, each team received a map with seven locations, a list of clues, and a list of scavenger-hunt tasks. Then each team moved from location to location, completing challenges in order to earn points, while also completing the scavenger hunt. It was a hot and humid day, but one full of fun and excitement as teams vied for first place. Some of the challenges included Bible charades, a “How well do you know your team?” contest, and the graveyard Bible trivia and word search. Winding down, we concluded the day with a relaxing cookout and campfire sing-along at Mr. and Mrs. Rod McNair’s home.

On Monday morning, we wrapped up the weekend by reflecting on lessons learned and important takeaways from our time together. The weekend seemed to have come and gone too quickly, but while we were together, there were certainly plenty of good conversations, laughs and memories made with old friends and new ones. *We built relationships in Christ.* It is certainly a blessing to have weekends and events like these that truly do build, strengthen and unify the body of Christ. When we are together and God is our focus, whether we are in Sabbath Services listening and learning, dodging uptown city traffic, or singing by a campfire, we are walking with God, and we are walking with Him together!

—Jacob Hall

Living University Graduation: Walking On

On May 14, Living University held its final assembly and concluded the 2017–2018 academic year with the institution’s largest commencement. The venue was Embassy Suites Ayrley in southwest Charlotte, with 170 attendees total, including 39 graduates present. Twelve others graduated *in absentia*.

It was a fitting day for students and faculty to receive honors in the presence of family and friends. The beautiful weather outdoors reflected the fine quality of the ceremony itself.

The Processional and Invocation preceded singing of the national anthem. University President Dr. Michael Germano gave the Welcome Address. Graduating student and Student Body President Travis Pate delivered the Student Discourse, reflecting on campus life and the challenges that lead to the true education afforded by L.U.

Dr. Germano was given a special tribute, an engraved crystal globe on a stand, for his years of service and dedication to the university.

Three students received awards. Mrs. Michelle Broussard, who was hired as Assistant Registrar for L.U. several years ago, received the **John H. Ogwyn Academic Achievement Award** for exceptional classwork. The award was presented by Mrs. Genie Ogwyn. Two **Academic Distinction Awards** were also given, to students Joshua Penman and Ryan Nicholson.

Students graduating with **highest honors** were Kyle Keas (CA, absent, Bachelor of Theology), Adam West (NY, Associate of Theology), Kelsey Stevens (NC, Associate of Theology), Michelle Broussard (NC, Bachelor of Theology) and Joshua Penman (NC, Bachelor of Theology). Students graduating with **high honors** were Briona Martin (NC, Bachelor of Theology) and Louis Marchand (MA, absent, Diploma in Biblical Studies).

An uplifting vocal solo of “Climb Every Mountain” by Miss Rebekah Ross followed the award presentations, after which Presiding Evangelist and Chancellor of Living University, Mr. Gerald Weston, gave the Commencement Address. The conferring of credentials followed, and after the ceremony, graduates, their families and guests were invited to remain and fellowship.

Living University ended its eleventh year with clear themes of overcoming challenges, embracing change, and following God’s lead, even when He takes us in unexpected directions.

As Mr. Pate said in his Student Discourse, “It has taken quite a lot of effort to get to this point.... [Living University] was designed to be a life experience that would shape the whole person. God, through L.U., has dramatically changed

my life and the lives of my peers.” He summed up his address by stating that the graduates were leaving Living University stronger, wiser and more well-rounded in the faith—and that being thrust into unexpected circumstances and relationships was pivotal to that result. As an L.U. alumnus who once stood in his shoes, and as a witness of that growth and change over the years, I can readily attest to Mr. Pate’s words.

Dr. Germano reflected on the history of Ambassador College as an antecedent to L.U., comparing the two institutions by citing the challenges faced by both. He emphasized the positive benefits and number of lives touched in the course of both programs and said, “Ambassador ‘set the norm’ and established an overall approach to God-centered education for Christian life.” He emphasized the important principles that both institutions followed: understanding that the word of God is the foundation of knowledge, recapturing true values and applying them in life, and seeing all the world and every God-given opportunity in it as a learning experience. Dr. Germano stressed that obeying God and applying these principles brings wonderful blessings—and that God “built the house and our effort has not been in vain. We have completed the phase that God had in mind for us to do.... Jesus Christ is the head of His Church and He guides and He directs our leadership.... We should rejoice in the opportunities that we have.” He concluded by talking about responding to change, not only L.U.’s change to Living Education and the need for graduates and future students to embrace and support that change, but the need to continue supporting and emphasizing the Work of God in a dangerous and rapidly changing world. He charged us all, graduates and audience, to give our wholehearted support to the Church’s efforts and to continue letting our lights shine.

Mr. Weston, in the Commencement Address, stated, “God takes us to places we would never dream, if we make Him a part of our lives and turn our lives over to Him.” He stressed the need for doing *everything* with our might and putting our own best efforts forward. Working together, overcoming, being a part of the L.U. endeavor—Mr. Weston called these things *education for life* and challenged graduates and all present to continue growing and savoring the things of God.

Positive commitment and optimism were clearly reflected in the University’s faculty and graduates. It was clear that the educational principles established by the Living Church of God for Living University will produce a successful yield and continuing legacy.

—William L. Williams

HAVE YOU BOUGHT THE LIES?

continued from page 4

Dr. McHugh does not set the standard for right and wrong, but his comments demonstrate that there are knowledgeable voices (he is not alone) who agree with Scripture on the issue. As he explains in this same op-ed article, gender confusion is a form of body-image dysphoria, a state of dissatisfaction with one's body. Another example of dysphoria is the anorexic or bulimic person who thinks she is fat, when in fact she is dangerously underweight and malnourished. To encourage her in her confusion would border on the criminal, so why should we encourage the individual who denies reality in terms of his or her sexuality? As Dr. McHugh says, we "are doing no favors either to the public or the transgendered."

Dr. McHugh explains that Johns Hopkins was the first hospital in the United States to do sex reassignment surgery but discontinued the practice ten years later in the mid-70s. A 2011 study at the Karolinska Institute in Sweden supported that decision. As he explained, "The study revealed that beginning about 10 years after having the surgery, the transgendered began to experience increasing mental difficulties. Most shockingly, their suicide mortality rose almost 20-fold above the comparable nontransgender population" (*Wall Street Journal*, June 12, 2014). These facts, rather than defining right and wrong, merely reinforce the truth laid down by our Creator.

Sexual confusion is not new. More than 3,400 years ago, it was writ-

ten, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:22). And nearly 2,000 years ago we find that there were women who acted as men and men who acted as women (lesbians and homosexuals) (Romans 1:21-22, 24, 26-28). Not only does God condemn these behaviors, but also those who "approve of those who practice them" (Romans 1:32).

As with sexual confusion, many psychological problems also arise when we take the life of another. Articles on abortion in *Tomorrow's World* magazine and the telecast "Tiny Fingers and Toes" give ample evidence that many have serious regrets, sometimes years later, for taking the life of the most vulnerable. God understands the natural consequences of destroying life within the womb (Exodus 21:22-25).

"Mercy killing," or euthanasia, may appear to be mercy, but to deliberately take the life of or assist in the suicide of an elderly, depressed, or critically ill person, neither takes into account the Sixth Commandment (Exodus 20:13), nor considers God's ultimate destiny for mankind. While God does not require us to artificially prolong life, and there is nothing wrong with palliative care, at the same time we understand that there is purpose in human suffering (Romans 8:16-18). Even Christ suffered in this life (Hebrews 5:8). We should neither take the life of the tiniest among us, nor artificially shorten that of the oldest, no matter the human rationale. Yes, there may be suffering related to death, but when God tells us

not to do something, we should not reason around His command. He knows what is best for the long term.

Living in Light

Why is loving God and loving our neighbor right? The answer is found in the difference between light and darkness. The commandments enlighten us. They give us understanding (Isaiah 8:19-20). Demonic spirits do not bring light, nor does human reason, unless it is aligned with the word of God. The source of that light is God and Jesus Christ (John 1:1-9). We see the connection between the light of the law and its source in 1 John 1:5-8.

In other words, *who God is* determines what makes certain things right or wrong. The precepts of God are merely statements of *who He is*. God's law arises from His holy, righteous character. To put it another way, we learn about Him through His law. The law instructs us on His value system. *God is love*, and His law teaches us what it means to love.

This world is filled with hate, often disguised as love. We have ample warnings against these worldly deceptions: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8) and "do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:2).

The truth is too precious a possession to trade it away for lies! ^(LN)

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—Wyatt Ciesielka

COMMENTARY

A Time of Restoring

Years ago, a friend and I stood on a mountain crest located on the Cumberland Plateau. Before us were broad grassy meadows, created from land that had been strip-mined. Although major damage had been done to the land, reclamation was producing positive results. The meadows were pleasing to the eye and the animal we saw near the edge of the meadow greatly enhanced the view.

When the first Europeans arrived on the North American continent, they found a land with abundant natural resources. Unfortunately, all of these major resources were badly used and abused. Most, if not all, of the flora and fauna were grossly mismanaged. Why did it happen this way? Because the overall motivation was one of selfishness and greed! God's way of "give"—loving your neighbor as yourself—was not practiced. Instead, the human way of "get"—of self-interest regardless of the cost—was followed.

From the beginning, God instructed mankind in the proper care of His environment. In Genesis 2:15, we read, "Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it." Sadly, mankind ignored the instructions from God. As a result, the land, plant and animal life, and mankind itself, have all suffered.

Can people take care of their environment? Can they be good stewards of the land and other resources? Yes, they can, if they practice the way of love toward God and love toward neighbor and reject the harmful way of indulgent self-interest.

Environmental damage can be undone or at least repaired in part. The scene I described at the beginning is evidence.

The animal my friend and I saw at the edge of the meadow was an elk. They had been hunted to extinction in this area over 150 years ago. Recently, elk have been reintroduced to the area and appear to be doing well. The reclaimed land provides a suitable habitat.

Until the twentieth century, the American chestnut was a predominant tree. It was an outstanding resource widely used as a durable building material, and the nuts were excellent food for both humans and animals. Regrettably, blight destroyed nearly every American chestnut tree between 1900 and 1950. Currently, there is an ongoing effort to restore this native tree in portions of its former range. However, the progress is slow and may not be successful.

The blight probably originated with trees imported from the Orient. Although unintentional, the introduction of this blight produced long-lasting consequences. The lesson is that society *must* be more aware of our obligation to protect our environment. Neglecting our responsibilities will bring future disasters.

In general, mankind has always shown the proclivity to abuse, misuse, and pollute the environment, with little thought for the present, much less the future. However, a change is coming. When Christ returns, He will destroy those that destroy the earth (Revelation 11:18). Then, He will begin restoring it.

In Acts 3:19–21 we read about a restoring of all things after Christ's return. Then, waste places and deserts will become like the Garden of Eden (Isaiah 51:3). Finally, human beings will listen to their Creator, and do what they should have done from the beginning: tend and keep the garden. When this is done, it will be a blessing to mankind and all creation.

— Martin Fannin