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Letters to the Editor

Kudos on the article on the disabled. I have spent much of my time on both sides, and Mrs. Hottle's article (October/November, p. 19) was right on the money. In many cases, the disabled are shunned because people think they need to be treated differently and don't know how to accomplish this. We are just plain people, who, in most cases have already found a way to overcome or work around a challenge.

IB, Pennsylvania

Comic Relief

How encouraging to hear about the growing community of Christian comic artists, and what a thrill to see comics mentioned in a positive way. I've loved comics for most of my life and have long known what a powerful medium they can be, but it's not always been easy to convince older Christians of their positive potential. Thank you for publishing this article!

TD, email

I received the latest issue of *Christian Odyssey* with great joy yesterday. I like to skim through the pages before I start to read the issue. Sometimes I'll read it cover to cover from front to back. Sometimes I'll work back to front. This time, I started with Javier Saltares' article "Comic Relief."

I have not yet had a chance to read *David's Mighty Men*, but I intend to make an effort to find and enjoy it.

I agree that comic books "are an art form, and can inspire us just like music, art or poetry." Some comic books and graphic novels deserve recognition as literature. As Javier wrote, "don't underestimate comics."

Letters for this section should be addressed to "Letters to the Editor." Send your letters to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA 91740-5005, or by electronic mail to john.halford@wcg.org.

The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space. We welcome your comments.

Some can be used for inspiration, education and expression, to break or to build. There is a Christian example to be drawn even from Superman, or Javier's own work on Spider-Man.

DK, email

I noticed the Lectionary readings were omitted from the December 2006/January 2007 issue of *Christian Odyssey*. I have found this section to be a welcome aid to my Bible study. Will the Lectionary feature of the magazine be returning?

MC, Ohio

We're glad that you found the Christian Odyssey lectionary feature to be helpful. We decided to discontinue that feature because it is readily available from other sources, such as www.textweek.com or <http://divinity.library.vanderbilt.edu/lectionary/>. You'll find more material about the lectionary at those sites.

The article in *Christian Odyssey* ("Do we have the right books in the Bible?" October/November, p. 14) clearly reflects the views on Scripture of Fuller Theological Seminary. It is clearly a neo-evangelical position. Personally, I don't think a noncorrespondence view of truth is supported by Scripture or reason for that matter. What I don't understand is why you don't cite any sources in the article, as anyone interested could go to them and get a much better understanding of your position than a four-page article gives.

BL, email

Mike Morrison replies: You are correct—our four-page article could give only a brief introduction to the subject. There is more to it than simply assigning labels to the explanation you like or don't like. Much has been written, and if people want to reach a better understanding of these questions, they need to read a variety of perspectives. For example, Inspiration and Authority, by Paul Achtemeier; Biblical Inspiration, by I. Howard Marshall; and Inspiration, by Al-den Thompson.

You encourage us to celebrate Christmas. But strangely, I find nothing about giving the presents to Jesus like the so-called wise men did as an example. How come you don't encourage members to give gifts to Jesus, because after all IT'S HIS BIRTHDAY, and not to each other? You sidetracked this issue by saying let's be more kind, loving, giving, charitable, etc. this season, but no mention of the traditional gifts going to Jesus on his birthday!

NL, email

Are you sure you fully read and understand the article?

I found your magazine in our recycle bin. I would like to receive *Christian Odyssey*.

MM, Iowa

This is not our usual way of gaining new subscribers, but we are happy to have you.

I had to write and commend your article, "Let God Be God" (October/November, p. 8). I believe you laid out some great concepts regarding "hell" and "predestination" in the article. Pointing out the non-clarity in the Bible regarding these subjects, you present the simple solution of "wait and see"—with faith that God can take care of the salvation of His creation.

Methinks Christendom has been overly-enthused with the threats of Hell's torments for too long as a tool to create converts. I loved your question, "Who do you think you are anyway"—as if God's success rate depends on our human effectiveness to spread the gospel to specific individuals in a specific timeframe. When you think as you suggest, it removes another heavy guilt weight from the Christian's shoulders. We still have clear personal responsibility and encouragement to share the Good News with others, but it is to be done out of a sense of amazement of God's goodness and grace and how others can share that wonderfulness—not in a dread of quotas and deadlines in which Christian believers always have and continue to fall short.

LB, email

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Where Next?

By John Halford

When I began to work with magazines over 40 years ago, I was a small part of an operation that involved dozens of separate steps and hundreds of people.

Articles were typed on manual typewriters. After proofing, they were typeset on a “linotype” machine—a clattering contraption the size of a refrigerator, with a large keyboard. The operator sat in front of it. Beside him was a pot of molten lead, from which whole lines of type were cast as he typed. It was an advance over manually setting individual letters, but even so, it was noisy, hot and cumbersome.

Computers and desktop publishing have changed all that. Today, from my small office in rural Indiana, I can do what once needed an entire department. I still use the keyboard, but a mug of hot coffee has replaced the pot of hot lead.

Two things have not changed, however—and I’d like to discuss them with you.

We want *Christian Odyssey* to reflect the bright new “face” that God has given our church since he showed us the way out of legalism. We would like to increase *Christian Odyssey’s* circulation. There are many spiritually hungry people “out there” who need to know what we have learned—the truth of the gospel of grace.



“He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help.” *Abraham Lincoln*

So what are those two things have not changed about magazine publishing? First, we need a steady supply of good articles. No matter how colorful a magazine is, how bright the pictures, or how good the quality of the paper, if it is not a “good read” it won’t do the job. Here is where I need your help.

If you were the editor of *Christian Odyssey*, what would you do to make it even more relevant to your reader’s lives? In this issue I have included a short survey. You’ll find it in the centerfold. It’s that awkward envelope you have to pull out. (Yes, they annoy me too, but they are a fact of magazine publishing life, I’m afraid.)

You’ll notice, on the envelope, there are a few questions about *Christian Odyssey*. Would you take a

minute or two to complete the survey form and send it back to me? The information will be so valuable for planning future issues. Tell us what you like. And if you think there are ways we can improve, please let us know that too. Abraham Lincoln once said, “He has the right to criticize who has the heart to help.”

The other thing that has not changed is the basic process of printing. Of course, there have been advances in that industry too, and our press in Ohio is a far cry from the grubby, noisy caverns that printing plants used to be. It is bright and airy. Computerized machinery hums and whirrs obediently. You could “eat your dinner off the floor.” But the basic process is the same—images are transferred from printing plates onto sheets of paper as they pass through a machine. That takes time and money.



How much time and money? Well, the most expensive copy of *Christian Odyssey* is the first one off the press. All the processes from writing the articles to plate-making have gone

into making that first copy possible. And even if that was the only copy, we would still have had to go through the entire process.

The next copy is much cheaper, because all the preparation has been done. In fact, we could go on and produce ten thousand or even ten million, without any increase in the editorial expense. But of course, we must pay for the additional paper, production time required and also the cost of mailing. There is also the cost of advertising to attract new readers.

Our current circulation costs are just about covered from our denominational budget. But that budget is stretched to the limit. So if we are to significantly increase our circulation, we need your help.

Not counting the cost for advertising, it costs about seven dollars to add a new reader to the list and cover the subscription costs for one year. Will you help us keep those presses running? ●

Watching God work in the Philippines

By Mike Morrison



“We aren’t coming for a vacation—we are coming to serve. We don’t want to be a burden—we want to do something that helps,” we explained to the Worldwide Church of God Philippine office personnel. So they put us to work, and we were able to see God at work in a dozen ways, in a dozen places. Join us for the highlights of our two-week “mission immersion” trip in the Philippines.

Did they really mean it?

Our first eye-opening experience came in a small city southeast of Manila. A church leader there had arranged a Christian music concert and evangelistic presentation for 400 students at a local university.

The local church teen band led with several upbeat worship songs. I gave a brief testimony about how I learned my need for Jesus when I was attending a university. We introduced ourselves, and offered to answer questions. To our surprise, they didn’t ask about America—they asked about faith. Our teens gave answers.

Another church band played, we did two skits, and two of our teens gave short talks. Our band played several songs. Rey Taniajura, a Filipino minister, spoke, and asked

people to raise their hands if they wanted to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.

They all raised their hands.

“This must be a cultural thing,” I thought. “They raised their hands because they saw other people doing it.”

“If you accept Jesus as your Savior, then follow me in this prayer, one phrase at a time,” Pastor Rey said. They all stood, and all prayed out loud.

“This would never happen at an American university,” I thought. “Did they really mean it?”

One of the teachers told the assembly: “I was born a Catholic and I was married a Catholic. I am still a Catholic, but I’m not so sure any more. I have never seen anything like this in my church.” At least *he* thought the response had been genuine. Then he asked, “Do you want to have an event like this again?”

They all shouted out, “Yes.”

A response that immediate must be genuine, I thought. This is what I needed to hear.

The local leaders are now working to help these young people grow in the faith.

Children and concrete

From there we went to Masbate Island. After a boat ride, a bumpy bus trip, a short trip in an outrigger boat and a short hike, we arrived at Balawing, where Lando, a missionary from Mindanao, is helping start a new church. Since fishing is the primary occupation here, the church is named “Christ’s Fishers of Men.” They meet in a bamboo building with a dirt floor. Our mission was to help them cover the floor with concrete.

We mixed the concrete on the dirt floor: Time after time, six bags of sand, one bag of cement, two bags of rocks, and water hauled in five-gallon jugs from a stream 150 yards away. It was hard work, but we had enough people helping that we could take turns.

But the floor was only part of our ministry in Balawing. We brought used clothing and various supplies with us to give to believers and their friends. They had more friends than we had supplies! Since most of the adults work during the day, we had church meetings at night.

Day and night, there were dozens of children. They played tag with our teens. We taught them “Duck, duck, goose,” and they taught us how to sing “Father Abraham” the Filipino way. My wife, Janet, shared the gospel as she made balloon animals for them, and someone translated for her.



“Now I have life”

On the way back to Manila, we stopped near Iriga City, at a small church among the Aeta tribe, remnants of the original inhabitants of these islands. We distributed some used clothing, vitamins, soap and toothpaste that we had brought. Janet made balloon animals for the many children, and we spoke briefly to the adults.

The next day, we drove several hours through a low mountain range to the east coast town of Infanta. About two years ago, a typhoon caused floods and mudslides that killed several hundred people and destroyed many homes in Infanta. Our denomination did not have any members in the area, but we became involved in the initial relief efforts,

bringing food, clothing, and other supplies.

After the immediate needs were taken care of and relief agencies moved to other areas, the church continued to visit the area and meet with the people. There were Bible studies for high school students; the teachers asked for Bible studies, too.

We had been invited to speak in the high school. (Unlike America, it is permissible to promote religion in Filipino schools.) About 200 students listened as our teens spoke. Janet presented the gospel, emphasizing that we are saved by grace,

not by our works. She asked how many wanted to accept what Jesus had done for them.

Many of them raised their hands.

It sounded like they all repeated the prayer.

There is much work to do in Infanta. There are many who want to know more about Jesus Christ. Our traveling pastor visits them once a week, but we need to train local leaders, too, so the gospel can flourish and spread.

As we gathered in a community center where our infant church meets, we asked the people about their experi-

“In remote areas, people don’t know English well, so we couldn’t do much direct evangelism, but we showed Jesus’ love by what we did.”

It’s difficult to go to school in this remote area, so the people don’t know English well. We couldn’t do much direct evangelism, but we showed Jesus’ love by what we did. Just being there said a lot—Americans don’t visit Balawing very often. Nobody does.

There are other villages nearby. Pastor Lando thinks that the next investment for the church might need to be a small, motorized boat, so he can go to them. It could be used to bring some basic medical instruction to the villagers, too.

ences in the flood. Many were traumatized. Many are still afraid of rain. But they can praise God because the tragedy brought the gospel to them, and made them willing to listen. Using a word-play in Filipino, one woman said, “I lost my *babay* [house], but now I have *bubay* [life].”

Hundreds baptized

A few days later, we went to Bulacan, north of Manila, where the government resettles squatters who live in shantytowns in Manila. It is a poor area.

About 800 people gathered in an open-air shelter for the evangelistic crusade. Crusades work well in poor areas, I was told later, but not very well in the cities. There are too

tree full of ripe fruit. I spoke for 10 minutes, and God gave the harvest.”

Unfortunately, we had to leave right away, because we had an appointment to baptize people who had been counseled by the local pastor. We had five teams of people in the water, going through the brief baptism ceremony. Other teams stood nearby, praying for the people after they were baptized.

They arrived busload after busload—a steady stream of mostly young people. There were 263 baptisms—a harvest we did not plant, but a harvest that God allowed us to participate in.

There is much growth in this area. They need Bibles.

We need to identify and train local leaders. A local seminary will train them for free, if we will pay for the books. It won't cost much, but it's more than the local church has.

Church in a dump

On our last day of ministry, we went to a small preschool, which a member started for those who were too poor to send their children anywhere else. While we painted the outside, Janet shared the love of Jesus with animal balloons, and

the girls played “Duck, duck, goose.”

Then we went to Payatas. Many of the people here make their living by finding things to recycle in the city dump. The high school principal let us speak in two classrooms—part of the values education curriculum. Each of our teens spoke about a value. Janet spoke about the gospel. All the students accepted Christ.

“Come, all you who are thirsty,” says Isaiah 55:1.

“Come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and

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many other things to do in the city.

In the mall in Manila, we were ignored. Here, we were celebrities. “Are you a rock star?” the kids asked Abel, our drummer, as he set up the equipment. The mayor spoke. Teens from the local church performed a dance. Our teens presented a skit showing Jesus taking our sorrows, making salvation available to all. They played several songs.

I spoke, then asked if they wanted to accept Jesus as Savior and Lord.

Again, the vast majority had a positive response.

“I did not do that,” I thought. “All I did was shake a



Two kinds of mission work

In the Great Commission, Jesus told his disciples to preach the gospel and teach the people who respond (Matthew 28:19-20). This is a ministry of the word. There is also a ministry of work—of doing physical service that helps others. When we give people food, clothing and other assistance, we may be doing it to Jesus himself (Matthew 25:35-40). This is not “bait” to get people to listen—we help them because they need help, whether or not they respond to the gospel. “Love your neighbor as yourself,” said Jesus to an expert in the Jewish law (Luke 10:27). “And who is my neighbor?” he asked Jesus (v. 29). Jesus basically said that everyone is, that we should have mercy on people who need help (vv. 30-37). Some missions focus on the word; others on work; we had some of each.

Is a Short-Term Mission Worth It?

Traditionally, a missionary's work needs tremendous commitment—it requires many years or even a lifetime away from home, living in remote areas in primitive conditions, battling disease, paganism and hostility—and maybe even a martyr's death—with no guarantee of results.

To swoop in on a jet for a few days of hard work and fun, working with friendly people in simple but safe surroundings—is that really a *mission*?

It can be. Or it can be a colossal waste of time and of money that could be better used in other ways. The keys to success are *preparation, mutual respect and ongoing commitment*.

Even a short mission trip requires *a lot* of advance work. The planning cannot all be done from the home, or sending country. It requires some personnel in the host country who know where work is already being done, who can arrange the details of where meetings can be held, where local believers can help, and where visitors will be most useful. It goes without saying that the visitors should be willing to go where they are wanted and do what is needed.

It is most important that an organization will remain in that country to follow up on whatever success there is. Mike Morrison's group asked the Worldwide Church of God office in the Philippines to help connect with activities that their churches were already involved in. The visiting group explained the kinds of work they had done before, what they might like to do, how much time they had, what their budget was, and what their concerns were.

Their Filipino partners explained what was happening in different churches in the Philippines, arranged a travel plan, and supplied vehicles and drivers. They listed the supplies the group would need to bring, and what would be best to purchase locally.

It is important that the short-term mission group have realistic expectations. You are going to learn as well as teach.

The biggest change may not be to the local people, but to you. To live and work alongside people of another culture, even for a few days, can be life-changing. Mike's group listed the following benefits:

- encourage us by seeing God at work,
- reinforce our faith in Christ as our Savior,
- force us to pray and rely on God in difficulties,
- promote unity among different nationalities,
- help us be more content, less materialistic,
- expand our view of the church and the world,
- strengthen a willingness to serve, and
- encourage participants to become full-time missionaries.

Short-term missionaries can also encourage the members in the host nation, and prompt it to do ministry that it wouldn't otherwise do.

A mission trip can raise the awareness level of Christians back home, both in sponsoring the trip and maybe establishing an ongoing relationship with the host congregations.

Short-term mission is not just about tasks being accomplished; it is about building relationships. Sometimes volunteers go to an area, establish meaningful contacts, then leave and are never heard from again. That can be hard for the indigenous people.

Ministry and mission are about remembering—they are not just a one-off “Been there, done that and got the T-shirt” experience.

Finally, remember that it is not necessary to travel to the ends of the earth. There are many short-term mission projects close to home.

A quick search on the Internet (type in “short-term mission” in the search line) will provide you with many web sites with details of short-term missions. There are also many books available offering practical and spiritual advice.

Interested? ●

An unusual opportunity

Want to try a short-term mission? For the second year the Scandinavian congregations of the Worldwide Church of God are organizing a Summer School in the small Estonian town of Kalliste.

This is an opportunity to serve and help a struggling community in Estonia by arranging a free summer school for the local youth and other activities requested by the mayor. The subjects we have agreed to teach are: English, Computer, Principles of living, Folk dancing and American football and baseball!

This will be a working camp for young adults primarily between the ages of 18 and 25 years. We need people who like to teach and work, who are flexible, have a good sense of humor and have a willingness to serve others who are less fortunate than ourselves.

Basically for singles, but married couples may also participate.

Dates: Friday August 3 to Sunday August 12, 2007. If you would like more information please contact the WCG pastor for Scandinavia and Estonia: **e-mail: cfaas@online.no**

Does it all depend?

By Mike Feazell

A few years ago, the Princeton Religion Research Center publication *Emerging Trends* reported that 56 percent of Americans, “with most describing themselves as Christians, say that when they think about their death, they worry ‘a great deal’ or ‘somewhat’ that they will ‘not be forgiven by God.’”

The report, based on a Gallup Institute survey, goes on to say, “Such findings raise the question of whether Christians in the U.S. have an understanding of the Christian meaning of ‘grace’ and suggest the need for more effective biblical teaching in Christian churches in this country.”

Impossible to believe

Why is it that we humans, even we Christians, seem to find the idea of simple grace so impossible to believe? The touchstone of the Protestant Reformation was the biblical reality that salvation—complete forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God—comes solely and only by God’s grace.

Yet, the prevailing view among Christians today seems to be that when all is said and done, when all the chips are down, salvation depends on what we have done or not done. It is as though a great divine scale will weigh all our good deeds on one side and all our bad deeds on the other side and our salvation will be determined by which side is heaviest. No wonder we are afraid!

If we are indeed saved by grace, and the Bible says we are, then we can stop worrying and instead begin to trust in the heavenly Father whom Jesus Christ revealed to us, who loves us so passionately

that he will never let us go. We don’t have to worry about whether he will forgive us; he has already forgiven us. “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,” the Bible tells us (Romans 5:8).

Accept the gift

We are judged righteous only because Jesus died for us and rose again. It doesn’t depend on the quality of our obedience. It doesn’t even depend on the quality of our faith. He has enough faith for all of us. All we have to do is come to his banquet, to the place at his table that has already been set for us. Jesus said: “For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40). That is God’s will for you. You don’t have to fear. You don’t have to worry. You can accept the gift of God.

Grace, by definition, is undeserved. It is unearned. It is God’s free gift of love. It is given to every person who will simply accept it. Maybe we need to think of God in a fresh way, the way the Bible actually presents him. God is our Redeemer, not our condemner. He is our Savior, not our destroyer. He is our Friend, not our enemy. God is on our side.

That’s the message of the Bible. It’s the message of God’s grace. The Judge is on our side. He loves us. He is not out to get us. He is out to save us and bring us home. In fact, he has already done everything that needs to be done to make our salvation secure. Why not ask God today to give you the deep peace that comes from knowing you are eternally safe and forgiven in his almighty hands? He’s anxious to hear from you. ●



Philippines...

Continued from page 7

without cost.”

He has words for the rich, too: “Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare” (v. 2). How sad it is that the poor will listen, but often the rich will not. They have houses, but do not have life.

At a day-care facility in the area, we helped feed the children. We gave them rice with a small amount of chicken—probably the most nutritious meal they had that day. Sometimes the program is funded well enough to feed the children every day, but sometimes it is not.

Bringing it home

The time came for us to return to America. Here in the land of plenty, people need the gospel, too. This is where God has placed us.

When Jesus gave the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), he didn’t tell his disciples to start at the ends of the earth. He told them to start in their own neighborhoods. For them, it was Jerusalem and Judea. For us, it is Pasadena, California. Where is it for you?

You can go to some other nation and see God at work. You can also see God at work in your own neighborhood. He may work in different ways, and the harvest may be smaller, but it is still his work. Are you willing to let him work through you? ●

Confessions of a part-time waitress

By Brenda Plonis

don't have a lot of spare time between waiting on tables. But may I take just a moment to tell you about my job?

Waiting on tables is usually a quick way to earn immediate cash without the need for high skills.

But that doesn't make it easy.

I served tables all through school. Then for the next decade, I traveled the world and worked for Mercy Ships. This year I returned home and moved in with my mom for a few months before getting married. I freelanced for magazines and a local newspaper, and volunteered for short-term projects with various non-profits. But there is not much money in that, so I survived by going back to my high school job—40 plus hours a week waiting tables in a local restaurant.

The job is so not glamorous. It takes patience, multi-tasking, dexterity and politeness.

I take orders, serve food and clear up the mess customers make. Most people leave a far dirtier mess in a restaurant than they would in their own home. After all, they don't have to tidy it up. That's my job.



days, 20 percent is considered the standard. (If customers cannot afford that, then they should have ordered a cheaper dish, or they shouldn't be eating in a restaurant with table service.)

Sometimes I want to strangle them with my apron ties, because they don't see what goes on behind the counter. Between serving food, I'm filling salad dressings, the ice bucket, changing the juice containers, pulling pies from the walk-in, slicing cake, and creating hot fudge sundaes. I may have between five to eight other tables that are demanding my attention at the same time, all for different things.

So... I may not be able to grab that glass for a refill just yet while I'm balancing seven plates on a large tray, with an eighth one burning my fingers in the other hand.

Wait-staff generally don't cook the food; we simply serve it. So, it's usually not our fault if the food is taking longer than usual. The grill in the kitchen is only so big, and the cooks can't cook everyone's eggs at the same time.

Most wait-staff return to the table soon after delivering the food. This may seem annoying to some customers, but it is actually the customers' opportunity to politely inform us that their steak is rare, not medium, or that the soup is cold.

I am more than happy to give a customer another dish if they aren't satisfied, or to reheat something for them. But I get annoyed when customers get angry at me, or they sulk at their plate and then complain later to the hostess that their food wasn't up to par.

I do have feelings, and it actually hurts when people blame me for things that aren't my fault.

“By treating your wait-staff with dignity and empathy, you're showing them the respect they deserve.”

Tipping point

But customers have a job, too. Their job is to leave a tip.

You probably didn't realize that the “salary” for most waitresses is far below the minimum wage. Federal law requires that restaurants pay wait-staff a minimum of \$2.13 an hour, assuming that their tips equal at least the current minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour.

A percentage of whatever I sell is taken out of my paycheck for taxes, which means for 40 hours of work, I may only receive a \$20 check. While I also receive cash at the end of the night for credit-card tips, I'm also taxed on that money.

At least, where I work, I get to keep all of my cash tips. Some restaurants make wait-staff split tips with busboys, cooks, bartenders, or even amongst other wait-staff.

So the customers really pay our “salary”—that is, if the customers leave at least 15-20 percent for a tip. These

Unfortunately, the “after-church” Sunday lunch customers are some of the rudest and most demanding people I wait on. This past Sunday, a Reverend showed up with an “amazing grace” tie, a wound-up wife, and his extended family. He promptly put me in my place after I politely informed him that we were fresh out of the salmon filet—the very entrée he had his eye on.

At five-feet-four, I don’t tower above the tables, but as Reverend peered up at me over his glasses, he managed to look down at me, giving me a stern fatherly reproach. He stated that in the future, it would be helpful if I told my customers what we were out of before I took their order.

Sucking in restaurant air to gather my thoughts, I tried not to spit BBQ venom back at him.

I wanted to tell him that I had been working since six a.m., that I missed church because my manager asked me to work for another waitress, that we often run out of as many as six items during the course of the day, that most people don’t actually remember the waitress’s dialogue when she first comes up to a table with the specials and what they’re out of, and that at 1:50 p.m., I was simply taking this table because the 2 o’clock waitress hadn’t yet shown up. Besides, it was the hostess’ job to take that special out of the menu—she hadn’t gotten to it yet.

But I refrained. I simply apologized as politely as possible and said the problem was my fault. Wait-staff often accept blame.

I went home an hour after my shift was supposed to finish, and the Reverend was still sitting there. I asked another waitress to clear the table and save the tip for me. Despite the fact that I gave them excellent service, I’m hoping I actually got a tip.

But here’s a tip for you—free of charge: If you go out to eat, remember to leave your server a 20 percent tip. If they made you laugh, smile, or gave exceptional service (even if things didn’t go exactly as planned otherwise), leave them a little extra. Remember the things that are out of their control, and remember that they are still doing their best to serve you in spite of those things.

Jesus’ example of servanthood couldn’t be truer than in a restaurant. Yes, wait-staff are there to serve you. But by treating your wait-staff with dignity and empathy, you’re showing them the respect they deserve. They have feelings, and they are simply trying to earn a living—sometimes two. Your generosity and politeness is a service to them.

Somehow I think if Jesus were a customer at a restaurant, he’d be gracious, polite and generous. ●

I’ve Been Reading...

Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome, by Rodney Stark

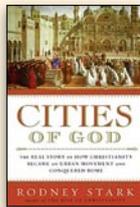
Reviewed by John Halford

Were the centuries between Jesus’ crucifixion and the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Roman Empire a rather sinister time, in which the truth of the gospel was hijacked, and the true teachings of Jesus subverted in an evil conspiracy? Is “Christianity,” as we know it today, false, and the truth only preserved by small sects and cults on the fringe of the “mainstream” churches?

This is a subject that produces much emotion. In *Cities of God*, Rodney Stark has looked at it from a different perspective. Setting aside traditional ideas and pre-conceived notions, he asks, “what do the facts say happened?”

There is a surprising amount of detail surviving from that far-off time. Historians have access to this data, but tend to regard them as peripheral to their preconceived theses. Thus myths are generated—and persist.

Using the actual data, Stark has been able to piece together a remarkably detailed picture of the spread of Christianity in the ancient world. He shows that it spread mainly among the educated upper and middle classes, and focused mainly on port cities. Rather than being an obstacle, the pagan faiths of the Empire may actually have provided a fertile seedbed for the gospel, as people gradually abandoned the temples in response to the superior appeal of a monotheistic faith.



Without deemphasizing the contribution of the great missionaries like Paul, Stark shows that it was the example of ordinary Christians living out their faith in their communities that was the greatest factor in the growth of Christianity. (For anyone seriously interested in mission, the book is worth it for the first chapter alone.)

Ever since *The Da Vinci Code*, there has been tremendous interest in the writings and beliefs of the “alternative Christianities” that thrived in the early centuries. Is there anything to them? Have important truths and revelations been suppressed? Stark shows that these smaller sects and divisions of the early church were not the desperate attempts of the few “faithful” to preserve “the faith once delivered.” Rather they were attempts to paganize Christianity, and were correctly suppressed. Orthodoxy may not be perfect, but it has got things basically right.

This is a “myth busting,” but reassuring book. Stark lets the facts speak for themselves. His sometimes surprising hypotheses are undergirded with solid evidence. What emerges is a picture of steady but relentless growth, not dependent on missional “superstars,” but on the persistent ongoing faith of people whose examples steadily eroded the inferior beliefs of those around them.

Stark makes his scholarship easily accessible to the ordinary reader. *Cities of God* will give you a new insight into the lives of the first generations of Christians, with some important implications for we who are called to continue the work they began.

Cities of God, *The real story of how Christianity became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome*, by Rodney Stark, Harper Collins, \$24.95 ●

Playing Jesus—a discussion

In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul reminds us to “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14). The Greek word is *enduo*, meaning “to put on as a garment”, or as an actor will put on a costume. Few people have had the opportunity to do this as literally as Bruce Marchiano, who played the lead role in the dramatization of the Gospel of Matthew.

Christian Odyssey: Playing the role of Jesus in Matthew had a major impact on you. Why?

Bruce Marchiano: Wow. I wrote a whole book to answer that question. I think it boils down to that scripture, “When you seek me with all your heart I will be found” (Jeremiah 29:13-14). That’s what that acting experience was for me. It put me in a position where I had to seek him with all my heart. My mind exploded with the Wow of him! And within that glimpse of understanding, all my priorities were rewritten, all my motivational foundations were rewritten, everything I thought was important was rewritten. Ah, but even beyond that, my sensitivities were rewritten.

What an actor does is to try to step into another person’s heart. To catch a tiny, tiny, billionth of a billionth of a glimpse of Jesus’ heart was to rewrite my own heart, if I can put it that way. The depth of his compassion, the depth of his heartbreak over human pain, over the lostness of lost people, over people coming short of his plan and purpose for their lives.

There are times to this day when sitting at a red light I’ll just break down in tears watching the people walking the sidewalk, as I think about their lostness, having caught a glimpse of Jesus’ reaction to these things that we just call normal life. To have those little seeds planted in my own life was to rewrite my entire life.

CO: Were you a Christian before you starred in this film?

BM: I grew up very “churched.” I went to Catholic schools until I graduated from high school. I had a deep understanding in terms of the awareness that there is a God, but I had no understanding of a relationship with God. People around me would get born again and they would start to share Jesus with me. I thought they were nuts. My whole life was about my acting career. Then, to make a long story short, the rug was pulled out from under it.

And I found that everything I had built my life on was “weak and shifting sand.” All I can say is, I just turned

to Jesus. I guess that all those seeds from those people who had shared Jesus with me over the years took root somewhere deep inside, because I knew in that moment I needed Jesus. I remember getting down on my knees and looking up saying, “Jesus, you’ve got to save me. You’ve got to save me.” And he began to reveal himself in my life, and there was no looking back.

CO: How did you come to take on the role of playing Jesus in Matthew?

BM: I found out about the opportunity through the leader of a missionary team. I had gone on this mission trip. I didn’t really want to, but I felt the Lord really wanted me to go. And so I went, kind of unwillingly. Little did I know that it would change the rest of my life.

The guy who led that missions team told me about the opportunity, and I made contact with the director. The director is a man who really seeks God, and he felt very strongly that the Lord wanted a born-again Christian to play Jesus. He also wanted someone who was not the traditional iconic figure—tall, Anglo-Saxon—but someone more authentic.

He sent me an audition piece for the scene where Jesus speaks very harshly to the Pharisees. As I was preparing for the audition, I thought, you know, it wasn’t that he didn’t like these guys. He loved them. He wasn’t so much being harsh as desperately and passionately reaching out to help them.

I explained that to the director, knowing full well that it was a great risk, because I had never seen it done that way before. Little did I know that six months earlier, when the director began working with the script, he felt the exact same thing, that this scene needs to be done in love.

CO: It is quite obvious in Matthew that you portray Jesus as the Lord of love and joy—quite different from the way he is usually portrayed.

BM: Well, the joy was a surprise to me. In my church background, joy was not part of the program. You could use the word in a song, but you’d better not actually show it. The director pointed me to Hebrews 1:9 where it says of Jesus, “Therefore God, your God has anointed you with the oil of joy above your brethren.”

I went down to a local Christian bookstore to try to find books about the person of Jesus. I couldn’t find any—not about Jesus the man. To make a long story short, I eventually found this little Christian bookstore, and there, sitting in the commentary section was a small book titled, *Jesus, Man of Joy*. It was misplaced, and I knew that God was trying to say something to me. So that’s where the joy came from, and that built and built. It just opened

with Bruce Marchiano



My mind exploded with the Wow of him! And within that glimpse of understanding, all my motivational foundations were rewritten, everything I thought was important was rewritten. Ah, but even beyond that, my sensitivities were rewritten.

up—joy. Joy, that’s what the kingdom of God is. It’s joy.

At the end of the day all I really did was what Jesus said. He says, “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” So as an actor I did that. Jesus didn’t talk about loving people, he actually did it. He cried tears over their pain. Instead of just talking about compassion, he actually showed it.

There is never a moment when he doesn’t love you. So everything I did, even the harshest rebuke, had to be founded on love, in the same way that you would tell your kid not to touch the stove. You would say it harshly, but it’s founded in love. If you didn’t love your kid, you wouldn’t care if he touched the stove. And that’s all I was trying to do. I was trying to keep them from touching the stove.

That became the challenge. Even in a line like “you hypocrites” or “you of little faith,” the audience had to see that love. It became quite a transforming factor for me. I would walk away from those scenes and realize, wow, he loves me!

I remember we did one scene where Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and the goats. On the first take I talked about how he will say to the goats, “Away from me, I never knew you.” Spontaneously I just started to weep and weep and weep. Unfortunately that’s not the tape that got on screen. Believe it or not, in the middle of the shot an airplane went overhead and ruined the tape.

But the outtake of that, to see “Jesus” weeping in the same sentence that he is talking about people who are going to be condemned, that’s a revelation.

When we finished that shot, there were 300 people standing around. You could hear a pin drop. Nobody ever imagined it like that. It was just a revelatory moment. You’ve got to understand that what we were doing was the Word of God, and that it’s living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword.

Time after time, I walked away learning something about Jesus’ heart. Every day was just a lifetime of adventures. There wasn’t one moment out there where it was just a job or drudgery.

CO: It seems that making *Matthew* has changed the direction of your life.

BM: Yes, the whole experience re-wrote my priorities, re-wrote what I thought was important in life, and re-wrote my professional direction. It’s been tough to give up lifelong dreams, but at the end of the day those lifelong dreams can’t begin to satisfy.

I just began to pray, “Lord, what is my life all about? What’s the purpose for which I was born?” It’s probably a guy thing, but I was thinking vocationally. I was thinking God was going to say, “You’re a filmmaker,” and that meant I wouldn’t write books or speak anymore. Or, “You’re a speaker.” But that’s not what the Lord said to me.

In the way he deals with me it’s as if he said to me, “You were born for the purpose of revealing my Son to my people. So I want you to take every opportunity, whether it is a book, or an interview like this, speaking in front of people, no matter what setting I put you in, reveal my Son, reveal my Son.”

Suddenly my life became clear. And I think the Lord would say to every one of us who claims to be a child of God, “You’re born for the purpose of revealing my Son to my people.”

CO: Do you have any exhortation and encouragement about how to share this with others?

BM: If I have to point to five highlights of my ministry life, one of them is my relationship with the Worldwide Church of God. I remember, ten or so years ago, as things were changing. I don’t know the whole history—it doesn’t matter—all I know is that I saw people in love with Jesus and bouncing off the walls with a fresh awareness of grace.

Back in those days I’ll never forget thinking, “Wow—these people, all they know is grace and the love of Jesus.” That’s all there is to know, in a sense. And the celebration of freedom, because he’s all about freedom and liberating people from sin, complication and self-reliance.

It was so exciting. I have said many, many, times that the transformation of your fellowship could be the greatest work of the Holy Spirit in the last 25 years.

Don’t move from that place. Don’t ever become a sophisticated denomination full of things. Just be a bunch of little kids in love with Jesus and stay there. Stay there. That’s where the rest of us need to catch up to. ●

Impress Yourself

By Rose Huff

The Bible says that we should not compare ourselves to others, but it's hard not to. For some of us, it starts early in life, when we think Mom or Dad likes a sibling more.

My two children once asked me which of them I loved more. I told them that I love each of them unconditionally and infinitely. They are different, of course, and there are special attributes that I really enjoy about each of them. That distinction—what I like about each of them—has no bearing on how much I love them. So I proceeded to share with them a long list of their unique individual personal attributes.

Unique personal qualities are a vital part of what makes each of us so valuable to our fellow human beings and to the whole creation. It seems to me that God created so many possibilities for personal composition that there is no one quite like you!

“Self-appraisal value helps me identify how I use my God-given personal attributes to fulfill the unique purposes God has set out for me.”

Personally, I find it a relief to realize that I am whole and complete as God created me to be, realizing that, on any given factor in life—talent, finances, appearance, style, education, opportunities, ad infinitum—there will always be someone with more and someone with less.

Identifying and naming individual characteristics with my children was the beginning of helping them with self-awareness. Even as an adult, I continue to be surprised by things that others notice about me and share with me. We need input and feedback to help us improve and grow. Understanding what comes easily to us and what we find difficult based on our personal abilities is a key to successful navigation of life's many challenges.

Here is part of a personal inventory list I made:

1. Things I enjoy: reading
2. Things I find easy to do, but not particularly enjoyable: ironing

3. Things I am pretty good at: rollerskating
4. Things I am not good at, but enjoy: mathematics
5. Things I must do: clean house, pay bills
6. Things I strongly dislike: talking on the phone

Making the list helped illuminate my sense of self-awareness. It is an on-going, ever-growing list that changes as I change. It was a fun activity to do with my children as well. They learned that our uniqueness is not better than another's: it is just different. It also happened to be useful in the division of labor around the house.

For example, I really enjoy doing laundry, my son enjoys ironing, and my daughter likes making sure everything is put away afterward—works pretty well. At the same time, we each dislike taking out the trash, but it has to be done. There's a life lesson that must be learned—life does not give you all the things on your wish list. There are lots of things in the successful management of your day that you wish you didn't have to do, but you do it anyway. It is the practice of self-discipline.

Spending my days believing that I am, even in a small way, using the unique gifts God gave me provides me with a sense of purpose and gratitude. Each time I behave with purpose, living as the person God made me to be, I impress myself. My personal best is taken up a notch, and

comparison with others is irrelevant.

When I impress myself it is impossible to have what I call low self-appraisal value. I prefer the term self-appraisal value over self-esteem because it refers to my personal inventory. Low self-esteem involves looking inward, being absorbed with personal shortcomings, real or imagined, impressing others, and contemplating your figurative navel. Self-appraisal value, on the other hand, helps me identify how I use my God-given personal attributes to fulfill the unique purposes God has set out for me in his good creation.

So instead of comparing myself with others, I make it a regular practice to impress myself. After all, I not only belong to God, I am the work of his hands, beautiful, unique and loved. Guess what? So are you. Why not impress yourself today? ●



Dr. Rose Huff lives and works as an educational psychologist in Southern California.

Generations Camps 2007

Christ-centered camps and retreats for children, teens, adults and families

Winter won't last forever. Neither will youth. But happy memories do. Soon it will be summer. So prepare now to give someone you love an experience of a lifetime.

WCG Generations Camp Ministries are safe places of great fun and spiritual enrichment for teens and children. The camps provide a wide array of activities in locations of outstanding natural beauty. All are staffed by committed Christian adults and older teens trained and supervised in accordance with Generations Camp Ministries' high standards.

This year the theme is "Cross My Heart". In chapels, classes, prayer walks and recreational activities, campers and staff members will consider the condition of the human heart apart from God. Then they will learn what it means to share the heart of Jesus—the one who died on the cross and now lives for us and loves us. Together they will experience Jesus' life of service and joy-filled love.



We have expanded the scope of some Generations Camps to serve adults and whole families. For example, our mission camp, Crossing Borders, offers short-term international mission training for older teens and adults who attend as singles, married couples and family groups. At some camps we are planning on offering seminars for visiting parents.

So why not send your children, grandchildren or young friends to one of our camps. See the map overleaf for details of each camp.

Left Behind



Perhaps you don't know anyone who would like to go to a summer camp. But we do.

Even though we try to keep our costs as low as possible, there are many children and teens who can't afford to go. But many do go—because of the generosity of folks who make a donation to help.

Would you consider being one of them, by making a donation to one or more of our camps? The websites mentioned on pages 16-17 give mailing addresses for each camp, or you may donate by sending a check to the Generations Ministries address below. All such donations are tax deductible.

You might just change the direction of a young person's life – for eternity.

Generations Ministries

Email: Ted.Johnston@wcg.org

Website: <http://youth.wcg.org/generations/>

Surface mail: Ted Johnston
Generations Ministries director
2238 Old Elm St NE
Canton, OH 44721



Washington

Gateway to God

www.GatewayToGod.org

Mar. 23-25 & Sept. 14-16. Ages 12-18.

Two extended weekend camp events held at a high-quality Christian retreat center with dorms with restrooms and showers. There are challenge courses with high ropes as well as team-building elements. At the September event we use a waterslide.

Heartland

www.HeartlandCamp.org

August 5-11. Ages 10-19. Heartland is held at a beautiful facility run by the Salvation Army. Surrounded by woods and farmland, free from urban distractions. On-site activities include archery, arts & crafts, softball, challenge course, worship, photography, videography, basketball, swimming, volleyball, praise and worship services and an amazing final banquet.

Colorado

California

SEP Washington

www.SEPWashington.com

July 1-7. Ages 7-18. Located at the Panhandle 4-H camp in Shelton. Every day we will have the opportunity to worship God and learn more about Him. The camp offers a wide array of activities including paintball (for teens), low ropes course, canoeing, volleyball, hiking, arts and crafts, interpretive trail, campfires, archery, swimming, fishing, paddleboats, chapel, and wind gliders.

SEP Rockies

www.SEPRockies.org

July 29-August 4. Ages 11 to 18. Held at Long Scraggy Mountain Ranch southwest of Denver, Colorado. Our goal is to help build a relationship with Jesus Christ while enjoying camp living in a wonderful mountain setting. Activities will include swimming (in a real pool), archery, volleyball, dance and much more.

Texas

Oklahoma

SEP So. Cal.

www.SEPsoCal.org

July 8-14. Ages 8-18. Held at Cedar Lake Camp in the mountains near Big Bear Lake, CA. In this positive environment we give quality attention and guidance to each camper, helping them find strength and courage to face the many pressures in their lives. Camp activities include archery, basketball, BB gun range, bugs and reptiles, canoeing, Christian Living classes, dance, drama, Great Banana Relay, high ropes course, paddleboats, prayer journey, swimming, volleyball, and water slide.

Crossing Borders

www.CBMission.org

Crossing Borders Mission Camp. June 18-24.

All ages. A hands-on mission outreach. Mission training occurs at our base camp near Laredo, Texas. During the days we cross the border for hands-on ministry in Mexico: visiting orphans, performing drama and puppetry, assisting in worship, serving at feeding stations, and more. Crossing Borders is not comfortable—it's transformational. But it will be well worth it.

YES Camp Louisiana

Email: Cryer@bellsouth.net

Ages 7-18. Held at Chico State Park near Lafayette, LA. Our mission is to plant the seed of Christ into the hearts of our campers. We offer swimming, water sports, volleyball, arts and crafts, kickball, basketball and a ton of fun. Teen camp runs from June 28th–July 2nd, concluding with a final banquet and dance. Preteen camp runs from July 2nd–July 6th. Scholarships available.

Pathways

www.PathwaysCamp.com

June 17-22. Ages 8-18. Located at Camp Coticub, a 150 acre Christian camp with a 14 acre lake, 170' water slide, the Blob, water trampoline, canoes, kayaks and paddle boats, basketball, dodge ball, football, challenge course, climbing wall, giant swing, and zip line. During the week we have a special "teen only" evening dance, and daily chapel services with awesome worship.

New Heights

www.NewHeightsCamp.com

August 19-25. Ages 8-18. Located at Camp Mattatuck with 500 acres on lovely Lake Kenosha near Plymouth, CT. Activities include swimming, canoeing, sailing, volleyball, archery, riflery, flag football, kickball, arts and crafts, dance, life skills workshops, climbing wall, and a ropes course with a 685' zip line. We begin each day with a chapel service. We humbly admit that we have the best camp food anywhere!

Camp Keystone

Email: Tom.Smith@wgc.org

July 11-15. Ages 8-18. Laurelville Mennonite Camp near Mt. Pleasant, PA. Outstanding natural beauty and a wide array of activities including field sports, gym sports, swimming pool, arts & crafts, a day at nearby Idlewild theme park and a daily age-appropriate chapel service with skits, drama and lots of music. We are planning a special program for parents—details to be announced.

Higher Ground

www.CarolinaCamp.com

June 24-30. Ages 8-18. Located on 100 gorgeous acres in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Activities include paintball, climbing wall, soccer, human foosball, water polo, swimming (lessons for those who want to learn), flag football, archery, dance, drama, arts & crafts, ultimate Frisbee, dodge ball, slime kick ball, and inspiring praise & worship, meaningful chapels, and interactive small groups. All activities and events are taught using solid Christian principles and values.

The Mountaintop

www.mountaintopcamp.org

April 20-22. Ages 8-20. Held in the rolling hills of West Georgia at Woodland Christian Camp and Retreat Center. Activities include canoeing, volleyball, basketball, flag football, hay rides, Great Water Balloon Relay, swimming, Block Party, chapel, dancing and more. We also offer food that doesn't taste like camp food...we promise—it's really good!

SEP Florida

www.SEPFlorida.com

June 1-4. Ages 7-18. Located at beautiful "Epworth By The Sea" Methodist camp on St. Simons Island, Georgia—one hour north of the Florida state line. Spiritual enrichment and worship is our primary focus. Activities include arts and crafts, basketball, flag football, volleyball, swimming, church drama and music training, high ropes course and a dolphin encounter boat trip.

Crosswalk

www.CrossWalkCamp.com

May 25-28/Nov 9-11. Ages 8-25. A challenging extended weekend camp held twice each year. Each event includes chapel messages, skits, dramas, seminars, great worship and lots of fun and challenging activities. We promise a spiritual high you will never forget!

Souled Out

Email: fjmoore@bellsouth.net

December 29-31. Ages 12-19. Held at a beautiful 58 acre Christian camp with a lake, two swimming pools, and a brand new conference center. Activities include Frisbee golf, basketball, flag football, volleyball, dance, arts & crafts, a ropes course, climbing wall, giant swing, pampole, and zip line. Campers enjoy innovative praise and worship, exhilarating praise dances and thought provoking messages.

Louisiana

ouri

Illinois

Ohio

Pennsylvania

Connecticut

Tennessee

North Carolina

Georgia

Florida

William Wilberforce: Christian abolitionist, reformer, statesman

By Paul Kroll

“**G**od Almighty has set before me two great objects, the suppression of the slave trade and the reformation of manners,” said William Wilberforce (1759-1833), the man who would be the driving force in the ultimate end of slavery in the British Empire.

When Wilberforce was born, English traders were raiding the African coast, capturing tens of thousands of Africans yearly and shipping them across the Atlantic into slavery. An estimated one in four died in route.

The economies of the British colonies depended on the slave trade. A promoter of the West Indies trade wrote, “The impossibility of doing without slaves in the West Indies will always prevent this traffic being dropped.”

As a young man, Wilberforce wasn’t aware of the horrors of the slave trade. After attending St. John’s College, Cambridge, he decided on a political career. At age 21, he won a seat in the House of Commons from his hometown, Hull. Small and frail, Wilberforce suffered throughout his life from various ailments, sometimes being bedridden for weeks and on several occasions at death’s door.

Conversion to Christ

In 1784, at age 25, Wilberforce became an evangelical Christian within the Anglican Church. He questioned whether he could pursue politics and remain a Christian.

Wilberforce’s spiritual mentor was evangelical minister John Newton (1725-1807), writer of “Amazing Grace,” and former slave trader captain. He encouraged him to remain in politics, saying, “It is hoped and believed that the Lord has raised you up for the good of His church and the good of the nation.”

Once Wilberforce learned of the evils of the slave trade, he devoted his life to its abolition. He wrote: “So enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did the Trade’s wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for abolition.”

In 1787, abolitionists Sir Charles and Lady Middleton persuaded Wilberforce to use his political influence as a Member of Parliament (MP) to legislate against the slave trade. He joined the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, allying himself with such dedicated

abolitionists as Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846).

Wilberforce became associated with the “Clapham Sect” called “the Saints.” Members were Christ-centered, Anglican evangelicals, influential in government and business. The group included such abolitionist luminaries as Granville Sharp, Zachary Macaulay, Hannah More and Thomas Clarkson. Wilberforce became the parliamentary “lightning rod” and team-building leader of this group of Christian reformers. John Venn, rector of Clapham parish church, was their chaplain.



The struggle and victory

In May 1788, Wilberforce introduced a 12-point motion to Parliament to abolish the slave trade. The motion was defeated as planters, businessmen, ship owners, traditionalists, MPs and the Crown opposed him.

The abolitionists, having to decide whether to attack the slavery institution or the slave trade, chose the latter course. Wilberforce educated himself on its evils and gave his first parliamentary speech in May 1789, a three-and-a-half-hour marathon. “I have proved that, upon every ground, total abolition [of the trade] ought to take place,” he told Parliament. But legislators were unswayed and buried his motion in committee for two years. Then, in 1791, the bill to abolish the slave trade was put to a vote in Commons and defeated by a landslide, 163 to 88.

Wilberforce now understood the struggle would be long and bitter. He unsuccessfully reintroduced abolition bills regularly during the 1790s. The early years of the new century were also quite bleak for the abolitionists, as all legislation introduced in Parliament against the slave trade failed to win passage. Then, the tide turned.

On February 23, 1807, 200 years ago, Parliament voted in favor of Wilberforce’s Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. Passing overwhelmingly, first in Lords and then in Commons by nearly an 18 to 1 margin, the bill received Royal Assent and became law on March 25, 1807.



Widow of Nain

By Joyce Catherwood

(Luke 7:11-16)

Through the efforts of Wilberforce, members of the Clapham Sect and others, the slave trade was declared illegal in the British Empire. Wilberforce wept for joy. Eighteen years he had fought the good fight in Parliament.

The struggle was not over, however. Although the slave trade was illegal, it still flourished, and slavery itself remained in the British colonies.

Some abolitionists argued that the only way to stop slavery was to make the institution illegal. Wilberforce was convinced of this, but also correctly understood there was little political will for emancipation at the time. He also feared that a sudden abolition of slavery would be disastrous for both slaves and society.

Wilberforce decided legislation was needed to plug holes in the anti-slave trade law. He pushed for a Slave Registration Bill with other abolitionists, arguing that if a slave was registered, authorities could prove whether the slave was recently transported from Africa. The measure was not executed or enforced.

Finally, Wilberforce joined the campaign to end the institution of slavery, but his health was deteriorating. Unable to campaign vigorously as he had against the slave trade, in 1821 he offered leadership of the parliamentary anti-slavery crusade to Thomas Fowell Buxton (1786-1845), an MP, abolitionist, social reformer and fellow evangelical.

In March 1825, at age 66, failing health forced Wilberforce's retirement from Parliament. His last public appearance for the abolition cause was at a meeting of the Anti-Slavery Society in 1830. While Buxton, Clarkson and others were equally important to the abolitionist cause, Wilberforce had played the key role, as team builder and inspirational, visionary leader.

Near death, on July 26, 1833, Wilberforce received wonderful news. The Slavery Abolition Bill ending slavery throughout the British Empire had passed the Commons, with passage assured in Lords.

All slaves throughout the Empire would be freed and plantation owners would be compensated. Wilberforce said, "Thank God that I have lived to witness a day in which England is willing to give twenty millions sterling for the abolition of slavery."

Three days later, Wilberforce died.

The Slavery Abolition Bill became law August 29, 1833, and came into force a year later, abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire. On July 31, 1834, one year after Wilberforce's death, 800,000 slaves, chiefly in the British West Indies, were "free at last."

A generation later, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation freeing slaves in the United States. With the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment on December 6, 1865, the institution of slavery in America came to an end. ●

The last place I wanted to be was in another funeral procession, with my anguish laid bare in front of everyone. I was the center of attention, but all I wanted to do was curl up in a corner and die myself. It was too much to go through this again—first my husband, then my only son. As we followed the funeral bier being carried through the streets of Nain, villagers came out of their shops and homes and joined the procession. Some were truly sympathetic. But others joined the flow of people out of duty, as they always did. They meant well—gazing at me and shaking their heads, they wondered what would happen to me now, with no husband, no son to provide for me.

"It was true. I would be destitute: a victim of an unscrupulous and uncaring system. But I no longer cared. Sobbing uncontrollably, it was all I could do to put one foot in front of the other. Just keep going, I told myself. Just keep walking.

"I remember that the noise of shuffling feet on the stone streets was strangely mesmerizing, helping numb my tormented brain to the reality of my loss. As we passed under the city gates, a man behind me gently touched my shoulder and said, 'Don't cry.' Before I could turn to see who it was, he hurried past me. It was Jesus, the teacher from Galilee. He went right up to the bier and laid his hand on it. I felt the crowd shrink back in shock as they observed him ritually defile himself by touching a dead body—my son's dead body. Those carrying the bier came to an abrupt halt, startled that someone had interrupted a funeral procession.

"Everyone, mourners and onlookers alike, stood still as Jesus, visibly moved with compassion, said 'Young man, I say to you, get up!' Immediately, my son sat up! I gasped. My heart stopped as I heard my son begin to speak. Staring at everyone around him, he blurted, 'What's going on?'

"My son had no idea what had happened. He thought he had just awakened from a dream. Recognizing some friends, he asked, 'What happened to me?' Stunned and speechless, his friends just stood there with their mouths open, watching a dead person talk to them! Jesus quickly loosened the white linen burial garments that had bound my son in death. Helping him off the bier, he put his arm around my boy and led him to my open arms. The shocked crowd of witnesses trembled with fear and awe, and glorified God, calling Jesus a great prophet.

"Afterwards, I often wondered, why me? As he came upon our sad procession that day, what compelled Jesus to dry a widow's tears? Had he been thinking of his own impending death, of his widowed mother and how broken her heart would be as she watched her firstborn son die on a cross? I remember well that even in his last agonizing moments of life, Jesus, struggling for breath, comforted his mother, making sure she would be cared for. Maybe that's why his heart went out to me. I can't say for sure. I only know that, somehow, my pain was important to Jesus. He felt my grief, he knew my uncertain plight, and he redeemed my life and destiny by raising my only son from the dead." ●

Dead to Sin—Oh Really?

By Sheila Graham

I grew up on a farm, so I know something about animals—great and small. Animals are still part of my life. Our home is surrounded by bird and squirrel feeders. There's also a birdbath where on hot dry summer days the little critters sometimes have to wait in line for a drink. I own a horse. He doesn't get ridden much, but I scratch his back and feed him tidbits anyway. I love animals.

Not long ago while we were helping a daughter move, I noticed through the window a couple of birds flopping around in the street. They seemed to be fighting. Then one bird flew off, but the other continued rolling around unable to get up. When I investigated, I saw the poor creature was injured. It couldn't fly; it couldn't even walk. Its back was raw and bleeding from where other birds had been pecking it. I knew what had to be done, but I didn't have the stomach for it.

When I returned a little later to see how the bird was doing, my heart ached. It didn't move at all now. It was dying—slowly and painfully. I looked into the sky and asked God for strength. He gave it.

“Would that we were as dead to sin as we are dead in body when this physical life is over.”

As I recalled the scripture that says God sees every sparrow that falls, I thought about life and death. Death, as far as this physical flesh is concerned, is so final, whether for a little creature or a human. This led to thoughts about the difference between life in the flesh and life in the spirit, the life that isn't subject to the death of the body. I thought about Paul's words to the Romans about being dead to sin but alive in Christ. Would that we were as dead to sin as we are dead in body when this physical life is over.

When I was baptized, I realized I would occasion-



ally slip into sin, but nothing too serious. You know, maybe pass along gossip or tell a little white lie or yell at my husband or kids. God doesn't categorize sin the way we humans do, so this was how I was thinking. After all, I was now dead to sin. Imagine my chagrin when I found myself tempted beyond my ability to resist—at least beyond what I thought I could resist or wanted to resist. Without going into any deep dark secrets, more than once in my Christian life, I've had to prostrate myself before my Savior and desperately plead for help in either getting myself out of a horribly sinful situation or avoiding one.

And yes, the words of the apostle were ringing in my ears. “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know

that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life” (Romans 6:2-4).

God has shown me, sometimes the hard way, that there's more to the Christian's new life than sauntering along life's path with a knowing smile on my face that I've got it made. So what in the world was the apostle talking about?

To delve deeply into Paul's theology would take

much longer than space allows here. Many books have been written on “just what did you mean, Apostle Paul?” Briefly, many scholars feel there was an “already—not yet” aspect to Paul’s conception of salvation. As Professor James D.G. Dunn writes: “Believers are ‘in Adam’ and continue to be ‘in Adam’; they have not yet died. But they are also ‘in Christ,’ and have begun to experience life, though they have yet to share in the full experience of Christ’s resurrection—in the resurrection of the body” (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, p. 464).

Note the before-and-after characteristics of these passages. Paul writes: “If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him” (verses 5-8).

Paul taught salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. To some Christians and non-Christians of his time, his teaching of salvation by grace was thought to encourage sin, to teach that all was now lawful. No, Paul said, in baptism a person dies to sin. But then a person lives to Christ. For Christians, there’s an obedience to Christ that goes far beyond keeping the letter of the law.

What does Christ require? What are his standards of righteousness? One has only to read the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 to realize how desperately we humans fall short and need his grace.

Paul writes that as a Christian I’m to live as if I’m dead to sin. Will I sin? Oh, yes. As much as I hate to admit it, I’ll still be spending time on my knees, confessing my sins and thanking my Savior for his forgiveness, mercy and grace.

I had mercy on that poor bird’s physical suffering, but my suffering, and yours, the suffering of sin, God took on himself in our place and then raised us up to new life in the spirit with him. In spite of my personal weaknesses, I know I’ve left the “before” of living in sin and I’m in the “after” of living to God in Christ Jesus. “The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:10-11). ●



Sheila Graham is a freelance writer and speaker on religious topics, including the role of women in the church, women of the Bible, the family, the environment and other Christian-related subjects. She holds degrees in religion from Azusa Pacific University’s Haggard School of Theology and from Claremont Graduate University.

In Other Words

Get Salty

By James R. Henderson

In some areas of the world salt can be difficult to come by. Occasionally it goes stale and seems to lose its essential saltiness.

A Congolese tribe has a proverb that goes “Amby/ofel’ekae, bokw/onko bobo.” A rough translation is, “Stop finding fault with greens; that salt is bad.” It means that if the salt is off, then use some herbs to season the meal. Sounds like a healthy idea, doesn’t it?

Jesus explained that tasteless salt is worthless, fit only to be thrown out. “Salt is good,” he said, “but if the salt loses its flavor, how will you season it?” (Mark 9:49-50, NKJ). His answer to us is to “have salt in yourselves, and have peace with one another.” Somehow a well-seasoned life is connected to living peaceably with other people. Matthew’s version of the same story has Jesus proclaiming that we “are the salt of the world” (Matthew 5:13).

What does Jesus mean? I think he means that our lives should be seasoned with grace. The grace we have received is meant to flavor the lives of others around us. Sometimes, however, we let our grace grow stale and we are of little help to anyone. The grace Jesus gave us should not be sitting unused in some cupboard, growing old and stale. It is to be put to use, enriching the lives of others. ●



Already in the Kingdom

A study of Colossians 1

By Mike Morrison

Colosse was a small city in Asia Minor, not important for much of anything—it is known to us chiefly because the apostle Paul wrote a letter to the believers who lived there. The church was started by Epaphras, who had learned about Christ from Paul, so even though Paul hadn't started the church, he felt a sense of responsibility for its health and growth.

Strange ideas were circulating in Colossae. False teachers were saying that knowing about Jesus was a good beginning, but that believers needed deeper wisdom and some new ascetic practices in order to reach their true potential. Epaphras had tried to set them straight, but Paul thought it would be helpful for him to assure the Colossians that the gospel they heard from Epaphras was indeed the complete gospel.

Their growth comes from knowledge the gospel has given them: **The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you** (v. 5). By the word “hope,” Paul is referring to the *object* of our hope—a heavenly reward. Christian life, including faith toward God and love toward others, is given a foundation by knowing that God gives us eternal life.

Paul reminds them that they are part of a growing movement: **All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth** (v. 6). He assures them that they have heard *all* the truth—they do not need any supplements or add-ons to bring them to a higher level of spirituality.

You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit (vv. 7-8). Since

“Paul did not wait for a crisis to pray for the people—as soon as he heard about their love, he started praying for their growth in wisdom.”

Address information

The letter begins by saying who wrote it: **Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother** (1:1). Greek letters didn't normally name companions as co-authors, so it is likely that Timothy helped write this letter.

Next, the recipients are greeted: **To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father** (v. 2). Paul believes that they are faithful; he does not seem to think that they are in serious danger of apostasy—they just need some reassurance.

Prayer of gratitude

Greek letters often began with a prayer or blessing; Paul modifies this custom to tell the Colossians what he prays about. He praises them indirectly, giving God the credit for their faith and love: **We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints** (vv. 3-4).

Paul could not go everywhere, he trained people like Epaphras to be part of a missionary team that carried the gospel into outlying areas. He brought back news to Paul that the people in Colosse were responding to the gospel.

After this, Paul resumes the description of his prayers for the people: **For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding** (v. 9). Paul did not wait for a crisis to pray for the people—as soon as he heard about their love, he started praying for their growth in wisdom. He did not mean additional information—he wanted them to grow in their understanding of the message they had already received.

Why did he pray for this? Because he wanted to see their faith and love be evident in the way they lived: **And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way** (v. 10). Paul then lists four ways in which believers might please God:



1. **Bearing fruit in every good work,**
2. **growing in the knowledge of God,**
3. **being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and**
4. **joyfully giving thanks to the Father** (vv. 10-12).

Paul wanted the believers to know God's will so they would do good works, learn more about God, have strength to withstand difficulties, and remain thankful.

Already qualified

One reason to be thankful is that God has already qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. We could not qualify on our own, but God did it for us. How did he do that? **He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins** (vv. 13-14).

Our sins would disqualify us from the kingdom of light, but God, in Jesus, has forgiven our sins, so we are now qualified. Just as God redeemed the Israelites out of Egypt and gave them land as an inheritance, he redeemed or rescued us from the dominion of darkness and sin, and has given us our inheritance.

Christ is supreme

In a poetic passage, Paul then describes how great Christ is: **He is the image of the invisible God...** He shows us what God is like—not in physical characteristics, but in spiritual attributes such as love and righteousness. He is also **...the firstborn over all creation** (v. 15). This does not refer to a birth or any other beginning in time. Rather, “firstborn” refers to a pre-eminent status.

Christ has this superiority because he is the Creator: **For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him** (v. 16). Christians do not need to appease government officials or spirit beings; we are already approved by Christ, the highest of all powers.

Paul summarizes: **He is before all things, and in him all things hold together** (v. 17). He sustains all that he has created.

After recounting Christ's role with creation, Paul describes his role in redemption, the new creation: **And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead** [the first to be raised from the realm of the dead], **so that in everything he might have the supremacy** (v. 18).

Paul again mentions that Jesus is a complete representation of the Father, and a complete Savior: **For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him** [Jesus is

fully divine], **and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross** (vv. 19-20).

Earlier, Paul used the metaphor of redemption. Here, he describes salvation as reconciliation, making peace between enemies. God achieved this peace by sending Jesus, who was not only fully divine, but also fully human—someone who could represent all creation in his atoning death on the cross. The Creator became part of creation in order to rescue us from our own sinfulness. In him we died, and in him we are raised to new life—life with God.

Once you were alienated from God, Paul says, and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior (v. 21). Yes, our sins had separated us from God. **But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death.**

Why? **To present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation** (v. 22). The debt has been paid, the sin has been erased; there can be no accusation for those who trust in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1, 33-34). When we appear before God, we are holy in Christ—fully qualified for his kingdom.

There is one requirement: **...if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel** (Col. 1:23). You are on the right boat, headed to the right destination. Don't jump ship—this is the right ship. The ticket has been paid for, so you don't need to work for it. Jesus has done all that needs to be done—he is the only one who could, and the only one who did.

This is the gospel that you heard, Paul assures the Colossians, and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant (v. 23). You have heard the real gospel, and you already know enough, Paul says—you do not need any secret, obscure information or any extra rituals. You are already in the kingdom of Christ. It's good news! ●

Questions for discussion

- 1. How often do I pray that others might grow in wisdom and knowledge? (v. 9)
- 2. Is it *possible* for people to live a life worthy of the Lord and do everything he wants? (v. 10)
- 3. Do I *feel* like I am in the kingdom of Christ? (v. 13)
- 4. Is Christ supreme in my life and thought? (v. 18)
- 5. When I was alienated from God, did I *feel* alienated? (v. 21)
- 6. What supplements do people try to put on the gospel today?

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Hmm...

Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.

William Arthur Ward

The value of consistent prayer is not that He will hear us, but that we will hear Him.

William McGill

If you can't feed a hundred people, then just feed one.

Mother Teresa

Long ago when men cursed and beat the ground with sticks, it was called "witchcraft." Today, it's called "golf."

Anon

Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers.

Voltaire

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness.

C.S. Lewis

Courage is going from failure to failure without losing enthusiasm.

Winston Churchill

We all live with the objective of being happy; our lives are all different and yet the same.

Anne Frank

The mind is its own place, and in itself, can make heaven of Hell, and a hell of Heaven.

John Milton

Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.

Gandhi

Some churches concoct a hash from ingredients like patriotism, moralism, cultural values (like materialism and the quest for the perfect "high"), with some wisdom from "celebrities" mixed with selected Bible verses, and then they serve this hash as "Christianity"; that hash panders to people's tastes and inflates "church attendance" statistics, though the hash is far from real Christianity and leaves people's souls malnourished.

George G. Hunter III

There is a great deal of difference between believing something still and believing it again.

W.H. Auden

Success is not the key to happiness. Happiness is the key to success. If you love what you are doing, you will be successful.

Albert Schweitzer

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