

The Sabbath Sentinel

September–October 2009



What are her religious rights in public school?

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

Jesus said, "the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath"

The Sabbath Sentinel

September–October 2009 Volume 61, No. 5 Issue 539

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Our Cover: "And, ye fathers, ... bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).
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What Are a Student's Religious Rights in Public School?



Most schools in the U.S. will be starting classes in August or early September. Every year, however, there is confusion among Christian parents, school teachers and administrators regarding what kinds of activities and types of religious expression are allowed in public schools. The U.S. Department of Education has printed guidelines on students' and teachers' rights, and they are offered in a pamphlet offered by Gateways to Better Education in conjunction with the Alliance Defense Fund.

These guidelines were first laid out formally under the Clinton administration. In setting policy for future administrations, President Clinton stated, "Nothing in the First Amendment converts our public schools into religion-free zones, or requires all religious expression to be left behind at the school house door" (July 12, 1995). President Clinton amplified on his statement in 1998 when he declared, "...Schools do more than train children's minds. They also help to nurture their souls by reinforcing the values they learn at home and in their communities. I believe that one of the best ways we can help out schools to do this is by supporting students' rights to voluntarily practice their religious beliefs, including prayer in schools.... For more than 200 years, the First Amendment has protected our religious freedom and allowed many faiths to flourish in our homes, in our work place and in our schools. Clearly understood and sensibly applied, it works" (May 30, 1998).

Richard Riley, Secretary of Education under President Clinton, laid out clear guidelines for the preservation of freedom of religion in education in 1998. These guidelines are based on prior Supreme Court decisions and are still in force today. In a speech to educators Secretary Riley stated the following:

Dear American Educator,

Almost three years ago, President Clinton directed me, as U.S. Secretary of Education, in consultation with the Attorney General, to provide every public school district in America with a statement of principles addressing the extent to which religious expression and activity are permitted in our public schools. In accordance with the President's directive, I sent every school superintendent in the country guidelines on Religious Expression in Public Schools in August of 1995.

The purpose of promulgating these presidential guidelines was to end much of the confusion regarding religious expression in our nation's public schools that had developed over more than thirty years since the U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1962 regarding state sponsored school prayer. I believe that these guidelines have helped school officials, teachers, students and parents find a new common ground on the important issue of religious freedom consistent with constitutional requirements.

Here are some of the things that students and teachers can legally do:

1. Students may pray, read their Bibles or other religious material, and talk about their faith at school.

Student prayer and religious discussion : The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment does not prohibit purely private religious speech by students. Students therefore have the same right to engage in individual or group prayer and religious discussion during the school day as they do to engage in other comparable activity. For example, students may read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace before meals, and pray before tests to the same extent they may engage in comparable nondisruptive activities. Local school authorities possess substantial discretion to impose rules of order and other pedagogical restrictions on student activities, but they may not structure or administer such rules to discriminate against religious activity or speech.

2. Students may organize prayer groups and religious clubs, and announce their meetings.

Students may also participate in before or after school events with religious content, such as 'see you at the flag pole' gatherings, on the same terms as they may participate in other noncurriculum activities on school premises. School officials may neither discourage nor encourage participation in such an event.

A school receiving Federal funds must allow student groups meeting under the Act to use the school media — including the public address system, the school newspaper, and the school bulletin

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Last Man Standing

By Kenneth Westby



Often the outcome of a conflict is decided by the actions of a single individual, an election decided by a single vote, a family saved by the bravery of one, disaster averted by the skill of a single pilot, a nation saved or lost by the decision of one man, or the entire human race saved by the righteousness of but one lone man. Individuals matter in the course of human events. Individuals matter with God—you and your actions impact your world and make a difference within God’s plan.

For want of a nail the shoe was lost.
For want of a shoe the horse was lost.
For want of a horse the rider was lost.
For want of a rider the battle was lost.
For want of a battle the kingdom was lost.
(15th century French proverb)

“The power of one” has many witnesses. Often they are hailed as heroes for rallying an army to victory, for standing up to tyranny when all others sat down, for doggedly pursuing an idea, an invention, or a medicine that changed the world.

Some of these individuals had statues raised to their honor, reaped the praise of their contemporaries, and took their place among history’s greats. However, most who have proven *the power of one* to make an important difference remain unknown, unacknowledged, yet their contributions are no less important as those of history’s heroes. Can you not stand up for God, family, country, and conscience to become a power of one? A need may be waiting for you to take a stand for God and against evil. Perhaps God is also waiting.

Not content to be a pew-sitter, William Wilberforce was propelled forward by an on-fire conscience that told him slavery was a corrupting evil, a despicable injustice against human dignity and freedom, and a stench in God’s nostrils. His fiery zeal ignited the consciences of the entire British Empire against the age-old institution of slavery. His tireless campaigning led other nations to follow Britain in outlawing the slave trade. History is full of examples of a single person sparking



William Wilberforce

big changes in the world—in the case of slavery, a long overdue righteous and godly change.

People Matter

There have been moments in history and in the history of Israel when no one could be found to stand up. Let me add to the French proverb above.

For want of a righteous man the nation was lost.

It happened to the Kingdom of Judah in the 6th century B.C. The story is told by Ezekiel who quotes God saying:

The people of the land [Judah] practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice.

I looked for **a man** among them who would build up the wall and **stand** before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but **I found none!**

So I will pour out my wrath on them and consume them with my fiery anger, bringing down on their own heads all they have done, declares the Sovereign LORD.

(Ezekiel 22:29-31, NIV, emphasis mine)

God was looking for one man in the entire nation who had the guts and conviction to stand up against the corruption in the royal house of Judah, against the leaders and chiefs of the people, and the timid priests who whitewashed their crimes.

Surely, in that entire nation there would be one person of moral fortitude who would try to interpose himself — build a restraining wall to “stand in the gap” — to stop the national ruin. Sadly, there was none — no one with the moral courage to stem the tide (Jeremiah excepted as he had no official standing and no one listened to him).

Judah's leaders had compromised their position to enrich themselves at the expense of the common people. The ungodly were setting the national tone. The priests and prophets supported the corrupt leadership by acting as religious tranquilizers and by whitewashing their crimes with politically correct but empty formulae (vs 25-27). The armies of Babylon were ready to march on Judah and Jerusalem. They came, they destroyed. For want of a righteous leader a nation was lost.

The overall picture of the kingdom of Judah at its nadir was one of extortion, bloodshed, immorality, incest, and irreligion. This is a terrifying description of any nation whose appointed time is drawing near. Political commentators in the West—especially America—take note.

Is the killing of fifty million harmless, helpless little innocent unborn American boys and girls bloodshed? Can it be called "bloodshed" when our leaders and courts and millions of citizens have approved of such massive killing? We need not look all the way back to the kingdom of Judah for examples of a nation waiting for judgment, a nation waiting for brave individuals to stand up with God against the tide of sin.

Contrast this sorry situation in ancient Judah to what Noah faced centuries earlier. His world was corrupt almost beyond measure, yet he stood alone for 120 years against the tide of universal rebellion against God. He was the last man standing, and because of him and his family, Yahweh decided to save them, and in so doing save the human race from extinction. God, in his longsuffering patience would give mankind another opportunity. I guess we owe Noah thanks for his part in God's decision.

The Roman Soldier

A soldier by the name of Cornelius played a major role in changing the world by being the "door" God opened to the gentiles. Over the centuries how many tens of millions of Gentile Christians have walked through that open door? God used Cornelius to bring a major turning point in His early Church. Did Cornelius just pop on the scene, or is there a story to be told?

Cornelius was a Roman centurion charged with leading the Italian Cohort pulling duty in the modern port city of Caesarea. He was a Gentile, but a devout believer in the God of Israel. He was an exceptionally good and pious Gentile who had led his entire household (and some of his soldiers) to also become "God-fearers" (i.e., Gentiles who worshipped the God of the Jews but did not become proselytes).

He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly. One day at about three in the after-

noon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God who came to him and said, "Cornelius!"

Cornelius stared at him in fear. "What is it, lord?" he asked. The angel answered, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God" (Acts 10:2-4).

Cornelius was shocked, fearful, and confused. Why would God send a heavenly messenger to him? The angel explained that God had taken note of his activities humbly and faithfully offered to God and man. He "generously" gave to "the people" (Gk. *laos*) which is a term Luke, the author of the book of Acts, often uses for the people of Israel, many of whom were indeed poor.

Following the angel's announcement and instructions to Cornelius, Peter received a vision, and while pondering its meaning Cornelius' messengers showed up at the door and invited him to meet the centurion face to face. The various encounters were choreographed by God, perfectly timed, and the importance of the event highlighted by heavenly signs.

Peter took the news to Jerusalem that God had launched a mission to the Gentiles. God alone had determined the boundaries of the Church, and He had directly intervened by this Cornelius episode to include all mankind in his call to repentance and entrance into the Kingdom of God. This was a major theological expansion of Christ's commission to the apostles, and it paved the way for the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15) in which Peter once again told the Cornelius story, and where Paul officially received the blessing to continue his mission to the Gentiles.

But let's put our focus back to this one man, Cornelius. Had not God sent his angel, we wouldn't have known he existed. He was quietly living his life and doing good where he could, discharging his duties righteously, and faithfully praying without ceasing. It couldn't have been easy for a Roman officer to worship Yahweh, the God of Israel, instead one of the many Roman gods commonly worshipped by his pagan countrymen. Did he take grief from his superiors? Put up with dismissive looks and comments? Disrespected for worshipping the God of these, weak, conquered, poor, foreigners? Probably.

Generously giving his money away to help poor Israelites was voluntary on his part. It was money he and his family could have used for themselves. Why did he do it? In what ways were those poor folks helped? Food, clothing, lodging? How were their lives improved, and how much better did their children fare from the financial help? Did these poor souls praise God for answering their cries? Was it unusual for a Gentile to be helping Jews?

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First Steps to Revitalizing Your Marriage



By Pastor David Guerrero

Speaker/Director Rekindle the Flame Ministries

As a counselor with a family oriented ministry, I often meet couples who are struggling in their relationships. Often times, from their perspective, the situation is hopeless and they feel or think that there is only one of two alternatives to take: divorce or separation. Usually what I see is hope. I see hope because they have taken the initiative to call Rekindle the Flame Ministries to set up an appointment to see a Christian counselor. As I listen to couples quarrel and explain to me their “irreparable” situation, generally speaking, I have discovered there are six initial steps they can take in order to begin to turn their situation around.

The first step is to help them to see the value of being patient with one another. The Apostle Paul, in the book of 1 Corinthians, tells us that “love is patient.” What usually happens is that couples have allowed the busyness of life to make them intolerable of other people. This includes their spouse. Work, church responsibilities, school schedules, etc., often take precedence in our lives, and we neglect the most important appointment (second to God) that we must make — time with our spouses.

Couples (especially husbands) need to realize that they are called to dwell with one another with understanding (1 Peter 3:7). This can only happen in an environment where two people see the value of being patient with each other and taking the time to really open the lines of communication with each other. This requires a determination and application of consistency as well. As husbands and wives, we must realize that our spouses are not perfect, and be willing to work through the differences and challenges that present themselves in a prayerfully patient manner. As we do so, God will begin to effect the change that is needed in our relationships.

The second item that is of essential importance is communication. Recent divorce statistics tell us that 80% of all marriages that end in divorce are due to ineffective communication. It is amazing to me that, although we have become a high tech society with advanced communication devices, we live in a time in which communication skills are probably at their worst. Let’s face it, today’s technology has created a very impersonal environment in which people don’t have to talk face-to-face with each other or can tune each other

out very easily. This environmental thwarting of communication skills has greatly affected the marriage relationship. Couples should do all they can to work on and achieve good open-communication skills. This leads me to my next point.

When communicating with our spouses, we must be “swift to hear, and slow to speak” (James 1:19). Good communication starts with learning how to listen to what the other person is trying to say. The best way to accomplish this is to agree on a time and place to communicate. Second, you must then agree on which person will talk first limiting each person’s turn to no more than about 20 minutes (I advise you to limit your discussion to one or two issues apiece, or you will drown yourselves in too many issues to address at once). After you agree upon these two things, each person must then commit to allowing the person to talk, uninterrupted, while you take notes on what you believe you hear the other person is saying. Write each issue down, and then when the person is done sharing his or her feelings, repeat what you have written down to see if you have understood the concern(s) correctly. Adjust your understanding as the other person clears things up for you. The objective is to get a clear understanding of the issue(s). Each person should take a turn doing this. When you are done, each person should have written out a list of concerns that need to be addressed. Now comes the good part.

The fourth step is to begin talking about possible solutions to each concern. Each person should share a possible solution, and it should be written out. A critical principle here is never to minimize or belittle a solution that is brought to the table. Never, never make fun of what another believes may contribute to solving a problem. Simply write the solution down and ask why they believe the solution they have provided can assist as a remedy to the problem. I have found that when people believe that their ideas are respected as part of a process, it builds positive relationships. After both sides are done, you should agree on which solution(s) is (are) best for each given concern that was presented. A critical piece to this step is to come up with an agreeable plan(s) to address each concern and solve your “problems.”

The fifth step is to begin to have what I call “a date night.” In most cases the busyness of life leads many couples to stop giving each other the time necessary to nurture their relationship. The results are deleterious as love for one another slowly grows cold. We cannot expect to maintain a marriage relationship without nurturing one another. Without the proper nurturing, what happens is that resentment and bitterness grow in the heart. I have discovered that many problems in marriage are the result of the lack of time essential to a good and godly marriage. To prevent and/or reverse the damage done by this lack of time each week (or as often as you can), take turns preparing some time that you will spend together. To make it more exciting, allow for suspense. To do this, set a principle in place that allows for each person to arrange the time, place, and activity of the “date” without telling the other person the details. Seek to please your spouse as you make these arrangements.

The final piece in beginning to revitalize your marriage is accountability. In any attempt to grow or change, accountability must be involved. Mature individuals must learn that we are accountable to God and to one another to fulfill the commitments that we say we are going to keep. Couples must lay out a plan of accountability as a means to check on their progress as well as to keep them realizing the seriousness of their relationships. Too many times even in Christian churches and homes, people exert an independent rebellious spirit that says, “I am accountable to no man [or woman]!” At other times the other extreme is exhibited where we feel that we cannot address the issues at hand because of the “who am I to say anything?” syndrome. This is wrong as we must speak the truth and address the issues that are getting in the way of having a God-honoring marriage. However, we must always speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Revitalizing a marriage takes good, hard, godly work. As we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, we can be patient with one another. We can also allow the Spirit to open our hearts and lives to effective communication. As God does this in our lives, He can aid us to be quick to listen as He leads us to a plan that will best remedy and improve our marriage relationship. This plan should include allowing God as well as each other to hold us accountable for the commitments that we make. As we employ these principles in a Christlike spirit, we will see how love truly conquers all (1 Corinthians 13).

Pastor David Guerrero is the founder and director of Rekindle the Flame Ministries. RTFM is a non profit 501(c)3 Christian organization that seeks to aid the body of Christ in experiencing transformation of life through faith-based counseling, seminars, training, and newsletters. Please contact us at (715) 310-2196 or on the web at www.rekindletheflameministries.org for more information how we can help you or your organization.

Jonathan

by Donald Mansell

David well knew that Saul had come out to seek his life; and while he was at Horesh in the wilderness of Ziph, Saul's son Jonathan came to him there and gave him fresh courage in God's name. 1 Sam. 23:15, 16, N.E.B.

Jonathan, son of Saul, king of Israel, is one of the noblest, yet among the least noticed, of Old Testament characters. As Saul's oldest son, he was in line for the throne, but because of his father's impatience, lack of faith, and disobedience in the matter of offering a sacrifice when he had no right to officiate, Jonathan lost the chance of becoming Israel's next king. A lesser man would have resented his father for his loss. Not Jonathan. Not only did he show no resentment toward his father but he remained loyal to him to the very end. The last glimpse we have of him while alive, he is fighting loyally at his father's side on Mount Gilboa.

But there is more in Jonathan's character that is worthy of imitation. Not only did he bear no resentment toward his disobedient, paranoid, and frequently demon-possessed father but he formed an enduring friendship with David, the man chosen by God to occupy the throne in his stead, the man who normally would have been his archrival. Why? Because he knew it was God's will that David should be the next king. He never questioned God's fairness in so doing, though in the minds of some he had plenty of reason for wondering why.

The course Jonathan chose to follow was not an easy one. It frequently pitted his loyalty to his father against his loyalty to David. On the one hand his father, while he lived, was the Lord's anointed, yet Jonathan recognized that David was the Lord's anointed-in-waiting, and he did all he could, short of being disloyal to his father, to save the life of the king-to-be. In every secret rendezvous with David we see him as a peacemaker, putting the very best construction possible on his father's motives. And this, even when on one occasion, in a fit of insanity, his father hurled a javelin at him, endangering his life.

Many of us are faced with what seems to us to be cruel choices-how to be loyal to a husband, a wife, a parent, and at the same time remain loyal to God. Such choices are never easy to make. They often involve pain and sacrifice, and in some cases, such as Jonathan's, their consequences must be endured for a lifetime.

What enabled Jonathan to survive while being torn apart by conflicting loyalties? Selfless submission and loyalty to God. As he made God first, God gave him grace to act wisely and to endure.

*Donald Mansell, **New Every Morning**, page 348. Review & Herald Publishing Ass'n. 1981.*

ALL of the Commandments

by Greg Sereda

(Personal note: "My name is Greg Sereda. I am a Sabbath keeper, and I love sharing my faith. I do this through sharing literature from Sabbath-keeping ministries and writings of my own with others. I am passionate about the Sabbath...God bless your ministry. Your Brother in Christ, Greg Sereda." Grzegorz Sereda #97265-011, Federal Correctional Institution, 3600 Guard Road, Lompoc, California 93436.)

Recently I was having a discussion with a couple of people about God's Law, the Ten Commandments.

This all began as I was walking with a Christian brother around the track at the yard. He asked me a question about Christian fellowship which turned into an inquiry about my faith, Adventism.

The man, whom I'll call Flako, asked me the difference between Adventism and other Christian denominations. I told him I'd explain the 4 C'S of Adventism to him so he could decide for himself. And for you who are reading this, if you're curious about Adventism, here are our basic beliefs:

The 4 C'S of Adventism

1) The first C is for Christ: we believe in Christ—Jesus Christ. We believe that He is God; and that He became a man to show us what God is like and to die for our sins so that one day we may be in heaven with Him.

2) The second C is for the cross: we believe in the cross. We believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins, and that salvation comes through His sin-pardoning sacrifice that He made for us on the cross, not by anything we can do.

3) The third C is for the Commandments: we believe in keeping the Ten Commandments. We don't believe that keeping them will save us (as some suppose), but since Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15, all scriptural references are from the KJV), we believe it's the right thing to do.

4) The fourth C is the coming of Jesus Christ: we believe that Jesus is coming again soon. That's why we feel it's important to believe in Jesus Christ, the cross, and keep the Ten Commandments.

Flako replied, "That's Christian!" I said, "I know!"

A Sabbath Keeping Christian

Then Flako asked me why I say I'm a Seventh-day Adventist if I'm a Christian. In other words, why don't I just call myself a Christian and leave it at that? I ex-

plained to him it's because I'm a Sabbath keeping Christian; that's what the "Seventh-day" in Seventh-day Adventist stands for. A Seventh-day Adventist is a Christian who keeps holy the seventh-day Sabbath—Friday evening to Saturday evening (Leviticus 23:32).

Flako had a problem with that. All of a sudden, I went from being a "Christian" to being someone who is "trying to live by the Old Testament, the old Law, the Old Covenant and attempting to earn my salvation."

On a side note: I am puzzled by the fact that no Christian ever argues with me when I tell them I keep the Ten Commandments. As a matter of fact, we're usually in agreement with keeping them, that is, until I mention I keep ALL of the Ten Commandments—including the seventh-day Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11). Then I become a legalist. What logic men use to come to this conclusion is beyond me!

Living by the Old Testament

I explained to Flako, again (the second C), that my salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone and that I'm not trying to live by the Old Testament. I'm trying to live by the entire word of God, which includes the Old Testament. But the Old Testament is not old news. As a matter of fact, the New Testament even endorses using the Old Testament for "doctrine [teaching] ... [and] instruction in righteousness [doing the right thing]" (2 Timothy 3:16).

Living by the Old Law

I also explained to Flako that I wasn't trying to live by the old Law. In a discussion later in our dorm, I found out that he thinks the Ten Commandment Law of God was replaced by two "new" commandments by Jesus Christ: 1) love God supremely, and 2) love your neighbor as yourself. But these two commandments are not "new," they have been contemporaries with the Ten Commandments for as long as they've existed.

For instance, the commandment to love God supremely is found in Deuteronomy 6:5: "And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all

thy might." This comes right after the listing of the Ten Commandments in Chapter 5.

The commandment to love your neighbor as yourself is found in Leviticus 19:18: "...thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" And you can find every single one of the Ten Commandments in Leviticus 19. Isn't that something?

In addition, after Flako and I got back to our dorm, I showed him where he could find some of the Ten Commandments listed in the New Testament, associated with the principle of loving your neighbor. Romans 13:8-10: "... love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

What that tells me, friend, is that love is the foundation of God's Law, and the way God has given us to **show our love** toward Him and others is **by keeping the Ten Commandments**. The Apostle John emphasized this, stating, "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments" (1 John 5:2, 3).

Living by the Old Covenant

Flako has the idea that the New Covenant somehow eliminates the Ten Commandments. I tried to explain to him that, on the contrary, it enables us to obey them by the power of God. The New Covenant language says that God puts His laws into our minds and writes them in our hearts (Hebrews 8:10).

That's far from eliminating the Ten Commandments. The New Covenant, through the process of conversion, puts God's commandments into our minds by leading us to acknowledge that they're good. Notice how Paul expressed this experience: "...the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good" (Romans 7:12).

God's commandments are put into our hearts in the sense that we come to cherish them. Again, notice how the apostle Paul put this into words: "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man" (Romans 7: 22).

Friend, has God brought you to the point where you acknowledge His Law as good, and cherish it? If not, I advise you to "Examine [yourself], whether ye be in the faith..." (2 Corinthians 13:5). "Because the carnal [unconverted] mind is enmity against [hostile against] God: for it is not subject to the law of God..." (Romans 8:7).

So, if you find yourself arguing against any of the Ten Commandments whenever your obligation to perform them is mentioned, then you need to change that enmity against God's Law into a delight

for God's Law. That is called conversion. That places you on the path to life, and off of the path that leads to sin and death.

But there is hope for you if you confess your sins to God, repent from them, and pray for the Holy Spirit to work out your conversion.

Confessing your sins and repenting from them leads to God's forgiving you for them: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and, cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1: 9). "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out..." (Acts 3:19). And the Holy Spirit, who is the agent who converts us (John 3:5), is available to anyone who asks (Luke 11:3).

Legalism

As I mentioned before, it seems as if most of the time when I tell another Christian I keep ALL of the Ten Commandments, I'm called a legalist. I'm sure you've come across this logic. Let's try to get this straight. If I keep nine out of the Ten Commandments, then I'm saved by grace through faith, walking in the way of the Lord. But once I decide to keep all ten of them by keeping the seventh-day Sabbath holy—I'm a legalist who is attempting to earn my salvation by my works and disregarding Jesus' sin-pardoning sacrifice on the cross. It's as if God is going to stop me from entering into the pearly gates and say, "I'm sorry, Greg, I can't let you into the holy city; you kept too many commandments. You should have just kept nine of the Ten Commandments, and you would have been safe. Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire."

This is the logic many Christians have adopted, but it's a startling contrast to the Word of God: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). In other words, to deliberately break one of the Ten Commandments is like deliberately breaking them all. Those who live this way are in danger of condemnation. Remember, Romans 6:23 says, "...the wages of sin is death."

For the record, obedience to any and ALL of the Ten Commandments is not legalism. For instance, if people choose to obey God's Law because they're saved and want to show their love for Jesus and appreciation for His gift of salvation, that's completely acceptable. As a matter of fact, Jesus endorsed this, stating, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). But if people keep God's Law in an attempt to earn salvation—in an attempt to earn forgiveness for their sins by making up for them with good deeds—that is legalism. It's all in the intent.

The Ultimate Source of Rebellion

I don't see any sense in the argument that to keep only nine of the Ten Commandments is safe while

keeping all ten of them is legalism. If you ask me, that's just an argument that unconverted people who oppose the Sabbath use against observing it; and their proponents parrot it without giving it any critical thought. Sadly, though, those advancing this argument don't realize that it's not man-made; the devil authored it. He's the ultimate rebel against God's law: "... the devil sinneth from the beginning..." (1 John 3:8).

If you have accepted the devil's argument that it's not necessary to keep any or all of the Ten Commandments, my friend, I urge to to reject it, and make a full surrender to Jesus as your Lord—as the One who has authority over your life and demands obedience to His commandments. If you love Him, keep His commandments!

Obedience and Salvation

Something else I'd like to touch on is the necessity to keep the Ten Commandments in order to be ready for heaven. This is a paradox: we're not saved by obeying the Law, but if we disobey it we won't make it to heaven: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

Obedience doesn't save us—it doesn't grant us forgiveness for our sins—but it does prepare us to live in God's heavenly kingdom. If there is any commandment that we are deliberately breaking, we need to repent so that we can enter into God's heavenly realm. That is because if God were to take us to His heavenly kingdom in such a rebellious state, we would sin there too. As a result, we would spoil the holy atmosphere of heaven with our sin; and the problem of sin would recur in heaven. Out of love for the inhabitants of God's kingdom, He will not allow this to happen.

We need to make sure that all of our known sins are confessed to God and repented of. Even if there are sins in our lives we are still committing, but struggling with, we need to make sure we're confessing them to God and in a repentant attitude about them. Be confident that in due time you will gain the victory over those besetting sins. Not only does God provide us with immediate power to overcome any and all sins (1 Corinthians 10:13; 2 Peter 1:3), but also the power to stay the course with patience to overcome those that are the most difficult.

Saved by Grace

One more argument I'm going to discuss is the one that claims that since we're saved by grace we're no longer under the law; that is, it's no longer necessary to obey the Ten Commandments. This is an argument I

frequently hear once I mention Sabbath observance to other Christians. We could be in total agreement about keeping the Ten Commandments; but once I pop the question of wondering why the majority of the Christian world does not keep the seventh-day Sabbath holy, along with the other nine commandments, this argument inevitably comes up: "We're saved by grace and not under the law."

It seems to me that many Christians are quick to disregard all ten of the Ten Commandments just because they don't want to keep one. They say we should keep the Ten Commandments until the fourth commandment is mentioned; then they say we don't have to keep any commandments at all anymore because we're saved by grace.

The reason I am bringing this up, by the way, is because a neighbor of Flako's sprang this argument on me recently, after I showed Flako a statement Jesus made about the Sabbath in Matthew 24:20 and explained to him that Jesus still wants us to keep His Sabbath holy.

But besides the inconsistency of many Christians saying we need to obey the Ten Commandments until someone mentions the Sabbath, and then saying we don't need to keep any of the Ten Commandments because we're saved by grace, is that a valid argument? Let's see what Bible has to say.

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin [disobedience to God's Law], that grace may abound? GOD FORBID..." (Romans 6:1, 2, emphasis mine). In other words, we have no right to disobey God's Law since we're saved by grace. Moreover, contrary to the popular belief that New Testament Christians who are saved by grace through faith are at liberty to disobey God's Law, the Bible tells us we have a much greater responsibility to keep it: "Do we make void the law through faith? GOD FORBID: yea, we establish [make firm, hold up] the law" (Romans 3:21 emphasis mine). The kind of liberty Jesus Christ has given us is not liberty to sin, but liberty from sin: "...ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh" (Galatians 5:13).

For those of you reading this, I hope some misconceptions about God's Word have been cleared up, some devices of the devil have been exposed, and you have been encouraged to live the holy life that God intends for you to live. Most of all, may it draw you closer to Jesus in preparation for His soon coming, because Jesus is coming soon. The way things are going in this crazy, messed up world, who knows how much time we have left.

If you would like to write to Greg, his address is given at the beginning of this article.

I Can, but Will I?

by Bryant Buck



In Philippians 4:13 (KJV) we read these words: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Many Christians quote this scripture when they want or believe that they should have a miracle. Personally I will take any miracle that the Lord sends my way.

Both the Old and the New Testaments are full of miracles, so why shouldn't we as believers in Christ experience our share of miracles too? However, in the context of Philippians 4, I don't believe that miracles were the apostle Paul's primary focus.

In Philippians 4:4 Paul exhorts us to rejoice; in verse 6 he encourages us to pray and give thanks. Then, in verse 8 he instructs us to focus our thinking on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. Moreover, just before Paul declares that he can do all things through Christ, he testifies: "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need" (Philippians 4:12 KJV). Paul's focus in this chapter is clearly on both how we behave and how we think. If our behavior truly becomes Christlike, then we will be a miracle that others can see.

Let's put this another way: If I can do all things through Messiah, do I rejoice? More than that, do I rejoice always? If I can do all things through Messiah, do I pray? More than that, do I pray with thanksgiving? Do I give thanks at all, or do I only give thanks occasionally? If I can do all things through Messiah, what do I think about—things that are true, honest, and just? Things that are pure, lovely, and of good report? Or, do I think about things that are false, dishonest, and unjust? Do I think about things that are impure, ugly, and of bad report?

Most news consists of things that are impure, ugly, and of bad report. Do I let the news fill my mind with things which are spiritually unprofitable?

What's more, do I know how to be abased as well as how to abound? We've had it so good in America that many of us have no real concept of what it means not to live in abundance. But if we lose every-

thing and are abased, we should rejoice because we're close to the life Paul describes in Philippians 4. Do I know how to be hungry as well as how to be full? Again, we've had it so good in America that most of us have never experienced being really hungry. Finally, do I know how to suffer need as well as to abound? Most of the people in this world wake up each morning and wonder whether they will have more than a few mouthfuls to eat that day. When was the last time you gave thanks that you were born in the United States or some other wealthy Western country and not in Bangladesh or Malawi?

The miracle that concerns the apostle Paul in Philippians 4 is the miracle of living the Christian life no matter what circumstances we are in. Whether we have food on our table or nothing to eat, whether everybody thinks well of us or everybody puts us down, whether our circumstances are good or bad, can we rejoice, pray, give thanks, and think about righteous things? Is our Christianity dependent on our circumstances, or does our Christianity rise above our circumstances? Paul knew that Christ could cause him to live above his circumstances. Do we?

With the things that are happening in this world, the day may soon be upon us when the life of abundance that we once enjoyed in America and the West may be a thing of the past. If we are unhappy as Christians today, what will we be like when our circumstances get worse? If we don't learn to rejoice, pray, and give thanks when things are good, how will we do when things get really bad? Paul declares: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content" (Philippians 4:11 KJV). If we as Christians don't learn this lesson now when things are relatively good, how will we do when trials and tribulations are upon us?

*Bryant Buck is assistant minister of New Beginnings Church near Rock City, Illinois, and is the author of the books, **My First Christian ABC Book**, for children, and **The Prayer Warrior**. See Bryant's Web site at www.partiallycensoredbooks.com.*

The Divine Subjectivity: The Great “I AM”



by Rev. Terril Littrell, Ph.D.

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Romans 11:33-34).

Children were asked to describe God. One child described God this way:

“I think He's an old man with a long, gray beard. And He sits on a throne like a king, and drinks all the Coca-Cola He wants.”

Adults forget the difficulties of being a child. Children are given few options in their choices, and they are responsible for much less than adults.

Children describe God as a being who does whatever He wants and takes total responsibility for His choices. This is a radical notion to them, like something they cannot fully grasp.

Perhaps God seemed radical to all of us when we were younger. Instead of acknowledging the radicalness of God, many adults try to defend him in a way that belittles and undermines His power.

For example, I read a commentary once on the episode in the Bible where the Ark of the Covenant was about to fall. In the story a man named Uzzah (who was not a Levite) stretched out his hand to steady the ark, and he fell dead.

The twenty-first century reader struggles to understand these passages. Such readers say to themselves that there is some defect in the translation or even in the Scriptures when they are the ones full of defective thoughts.

A commentary on the passage claimed that the man's death was like dynamite or a nuclear bomb. It wasn't that God chose for the man to die ... it's just like when TNT is ignited or uranium is slammed together.

Such commentary, of course, leaves open the possibility that God wanted to save the man, but He was too weak and powerless on His own to do anything about it. Or maybe He was just too shy. Or it was just the nature of the ark.

The politically correct God described by this age never chooses for anyone to die. He never chooses for people to lose their homes, or to get sick, or to read newspapers that are racially-tinged. He would stop all

of this if he could, but He's too weak (or He leaves it up to us, or He's bashful, etc.).

And the politically correct God never drinks more Coca-Cola than the government permits Him to drink. He never drinks more than his accountability partners allow him to drink. He never drinks more than everyone else so He doesn't look selfish. And He never drinks more Coca-Cola than His nature allows Him to drink.

But is this the real God? Is this God who lets things happen without ever intervening the same God who delivered the children of Israel from Egypt?

Is this the God who told Moses to call Him “I AM”?

Perhaps the divine subjectivity is the most offensive claim of the Bible to us.

We take issue against anyone who is not able to provide external explanations. We want to hear people defend themselves saying, “I filled out all the paperwork.” We want to hear them say, “I did this because that's what everyone else wanted me to do.” Or to hear them say, “I was just following the System, the pattern of this world.”

Maybe somebody in the Church approaches God and says, “Who or what is responsible for this?” and the fullness and completeness of God answers back:

“I AM”

The radical answer that offends and scandalizes us is that God does whatever He wants to do. His divine subjectivity has laid the foundations of the earth. All the scientific rules and objective principles of physics hold together so long as Christ allows them.

The preachers cannot polish Him into doing anything. The theologians cannot conform Him into the doctrines they invent. The Hollywood directors cannot invoke Him with their talented actors and costly scripts.

God is not a formula so that scientists and mathematicians can manipulate Him like an equation. God is not a history book so that we can revise Him as the scholars

revise history. God is not a politician that He should be bribed by the company of famous people or money.

This really is the heart of our discomfort with God, that He refuses to be bent to our ideas of what He should be like, and refuses to use His power in the world the way we imagine we would. The heart of our discomfort with God is not something obvious to us in the human sense; it is a subtle incongruity between our ideas and the otherness of God. It is something we deliberately push into the back of our minds — and along with it the possibility of becoming the person God wishes each of us to become. And the framework God provides to His people — the scandal of it all — is the obligation to become like little children.

Unless You Become as a Child ...

“At this time the disciples came to Jesus and said, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven?’ So He called a little child to Him whom He set among them. Then He said, ‘In truth I tell you, unless you become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And so, the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven’ (Matthew 18:1-4).

Jesus is famous for telling his disciples, “Unless you become like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.” But what does that mean? How does a person become like a child again? Surely, Jesus does not mean we must become physically small and chronologically young, since that’s impossible. In John’s gospel Jesus tells Nicodemus that we must be born again, but he doesn’t mean that we must come forth from our mother’s womb once more. Becoming like a child is not about size or age.

Practically in every child we find something left, a pure innocence, a simple humility and truthfulness which many adults have lost. I remember a very nice song, sung by one of our senior parishioners, accompanied by his banjo, entitled: “Just pretend.” That is what we adults are so often doing, just pretending, putting on an act, making other people believe that we are what we are not, that we work hard whereas, in fact, we often do nothing at all. We pretend we are strong when we feel weak; that we are brave when we are scared; that we are clever when we are stupid; holy when we are bad. We pretend we are fully in control and without a single care in the world, when, in reality, we are totally lost and our heart is weeping. We so often just pretend, but a child has not yet learned the skill to pretend, to cover up the facts.

We adults so often like to pretend, whereas children in their innocence call the facts by their name and reveal the truth. That, no doubt, is one of the reasons why they are loved by Christ. And another even more important reason is their humility. Sometimes children

can touch us by their simple humility, and humility, as we know, is one of the most essential virtues propagated by the gospel. Pride makes us deaf for God's call. Pride makes us blind for our own limits. It is because of pride that we are so often unable to forgive others and to acknowledge our weaknesses. It is pride that makes us cramped and unfree in our communication with others, so scared to lose our face, so frightened to make mistakes and to fail in the sight of our neighbor. Pride makes us so often pretend, makes us boastful and envious, dishonest and inconsiderate, always worried about the impression we make on others, ruthlessly striving for greater status, more esteem, higher positions in the orchestra of our society.

The following is a story that came across the internet.

“A little girl walked to and from school daily. Though the weather that morning was questionable and clouds were forming, she made her daily trek to the elementary school. As the afternoon progressed, the winds whipped up, along with lightning. The mother of the little girl felt concerned that her daughter would be frightened as she walked home from school and she feared the electrical storm might harm her child.

“Full of concern, the mother quickly got into her car and drove along the route to her child's school. As she did, she saw her little girl walking along. At each flash of lightning, the child would stop, look up, and smile. Another and another flash of lightning followed quickly, and with each, the little girl would look at the streak of light and smile. When the mother's car drew up beside the child, she lowered the window and called to her ‘What are you doing?’ The child answered, ‘I am trying to look pretty because God keeps taking my picture.’ ”

Would not a child's perspective of God help us to face the storms that come our way? Jesus said there were certain things he had hidden from the wise but revealed to the childlike (Matthew 11:25). The “wise” of whom Jesus spoke were those who had heard and seen God’s revelation in His teaching and miracles, but had not turned to God. In contrast, little children love to be taught.

God reveals Himself to the humble, childlike and simple. We must learn to depend on God as a child looks to a parent. It’s akin to what Jesus taught about becoming as children to enter his kingdom.

I do not have all the external explanations to God's plan and design for the circumstances in my life. I do not know all the reasons “why.” But I do know that God loves me and sent Jesus to die on the cross for me that I might have everlasting life. I do know that I can

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Editorial: "Students' Religious Rights," cont. from page 3.

board — to announce their meetings on the same terms as other noncurriculum-related student groups are allowed to use the school media. Any policy concerning the use of school media must be applied to all noncurriculum-related student groups in a nondiscriminatory matter. Schools, however, may inform students that certain groups are not school sponsored."

3. Students may express their faith in their class work and homework.

"Student assignments: Students may express their beliefs about religion in the form of homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free of discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions. Such home and classroom work should be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance, and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the school.

"Thus, if a teacher's assignment involves writing a poem, the work of a student who submits a poem in the form of a prayer (for example, a psalm) should be judged on the basis of academic standards (such as literary quality) and neither penalized nor rewarded on account of its religious content."

4. Teachers, administrators, and other school employees may organize prayer groups with other school employees.

"When acting in their official capacities as representatives of the state, teachers, school administrators, and other school employees are prohibited by the Establishment Clause from encouraging or discouraging prayer, and from actively participating in such activity with students. Teachers may, however, take part in religious activities where the overall context makes clear that they are not participating in their official capacities. Before school or during lunch, for example, teachers may meet with other teachers for prayer or Bible study to the same extent that they may engage in other conversation or nonreligious activities. Similarly, teachers may participate in their personal capacities in privately sponsored baccalaureate ceremonies."

5. Students may go off campus to attend religious studies during school hours.

"It has long been established that schools have the discretion to dismiss students to off-premises religious instruction, provided that schools do not encourage or discourage participation in such instruction or penalize students for attending or not attending. Similarly, schools may excuse students

from class to remove a significant burden on their religious exercise, where doing so would not impose material burdens on other students. For example, it would be lawful for schools to excuse Muslim students briefly from class to enable them to fulfill their religious obligations to pray during Ramadan.

"Where school officials have a practice of excusing students from class on the basis of parents' requests for accommodation of nonreligious needs, religiously motivated requests for excusal may not be accorded less favorable treatment. In addition, in some circumstances, based on federal or state constitutional law or pursuant to state statutes, schools may be required to make accommodations that relieve substantial burdens on students' religious exercise. Schools officials are therefore encouraged to consult with their attorneys regarding such obligations."

6. Students may express their faith at a school activities such as student assemblies and extracurricular events.

"Student speakers at student assemblies and extracurricular activities such as sporting events may not be selected on a basis that either favors or disfavors religious speech.

"Where student speakers are selected on the basis of genuinely neutral, evenhanded criteria and retain primary control over the content of their expression, that expression is not attributable to the school and therefore may not be restricted because of its religious (or anti-religious) content.

"By contrast, where school officials determine or substantially control the content of what is expressed, such speech is attributable to the school and may not include prayer or other specifically religious (or anti-religious) content.

"To avoid any mistaken perception that a school endorses student speech that is not in fact attributable to the school, school officials may make appropriate, neutral disclaimers to clarify that such speech (whether religious or nonreligious) is the speaker's and not the school's."

7. Students may express their faith at graduation ceremonies.

"School officials may not mandate or organize prayer at graduation or select speakers for such events in a manner that favors religious speech such as prayer.

"Where students or other private graduation speakers are selected on the basis of genuinely neutral, evenhanded criteria and retain control over the content of their expression, however, that ex-

pression is not attributable to the school and therefore may not be restricted because of its religious (or anti-religious) content. To avoid any mistaken perception that a school endorses student or other private speech that is not in fact attributable to the school, school officials may make appropriate, neutral disclaimers to clarify that such speech (whether religious or nonreligious) is the speaker's and not the school's.

"School officials may not mandate or organize religious ceremonies. However, if a school makes its facilities and related services available to other private groups, it must make its facilities and services available on the same terms to organizers of privately sponsored religious baccalaureate ceremonies. In addition, a school may disclaim official endorsement of events sponsored by private groups, provided it does so in a manner that neither favors nor disfavors groups that meet to engage in prayer or religious speech."

I have not covered all the material contained in Gateways' pamphlet, but what you have read are some of the high points of the U.S. Department of Education guidelines sent to every school district in the United States. It is true that sometimes school administrators and teachers deliberately ignore these guidelines and make life difficult for Christian students, but be assured that when this happens, the administrator or teacher is in the wrong.

As Christian parents and grandparents our responsibility is to prepare our children and grandchildren to enter the Kingdom of God. There is no more important issue than this one; its consequences are eternal. This means that we sometimes have to fight like pit bulls to make sure that these little ones have free rein to express their Christian beliefs openly, without fear, in our schools. If you are timid, just remember that it is much more important to fear God than it is to fear a teacher or school administrator. Your child's eternal life is at stake. Be the pit bull for your child.

If you would like to have one copy or 100 copies of the pamphlet on which this article is based, contact Gateways to Better Education at www.gtbe.org on the Web. The pamphlet is titled, "Free to Speak...What the U.S. Department of Education says about public school students' religious rights."

I would also recommend that you keep the Alliance Defense Fund at your fingertips. They can help with any legal problems relating to your children's religious rights in public school. Their Web site address is www.alliancedefensefund.org.

Many Christian parents have opted for home schooling in order to pass along to their children their Christian values without the negative interference of the

public school system. If you are a home-schooling parent, I highly recommend that you become a member of the Home School Legal Defense Association. They have helped many home-schooling families who have had problems with local school districts or social services. Their Web address is www.hslda.org.

I wish I could offer the same assurances of religious freedom in the schools of countries outside of the United States. Some countries are freer than others. I can only suggest that you become completely familiar with the laws in your country. I'm sure there are many things you can do to preserve the Spirit of Christ in your children as they attend local schools. Please get to know the laws in your country thoroughly, and take advantage of the opportunities that are offered.

—Kenneth Ryland

Street Preacher Faces Arrest after Reading Bible in Public

The news site, "Christian Today" (christiantoday.com) is reporting that Miguel Hayworth, 29, is being threatened by police with arrest for reading the Bible in public in the city of Manchester, England. Mr. Hayworth, who had been preaching on the streets of that city for the past five years was approached by several police officers at the end of July and was told that "It is against the law to preach and hand out tracts: preaching causes offense and handing out tracts is harassment and could result in an arrest." Mr. Hayworth was accompanied by his father at the time.



Excerpts from the King James version of the Bible read aloud by Mr Hayworth included Romans 1:27 — in which Paul speaks of men who, "leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly"—and 1 Corinthians 6:9, in which Paul warns that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Mr Hayworth stopped preaching after the officer also warned him that his actions were being videoed and recorded, according to *The Telegraph*.

He has sought advice from the Christian Legal Centre, which has appointed human rights barrister Paul Diamond to his case.

Is Obedience a Condition of Salvation?

By Marvin Moore

For 2000 years Christians have debated the role that obedience plays in our celebration. Let's take another look at the issues involved in this important question.

A number of years ago I wrote an article for *Signs of the Times* in which I said that obedience is not a condition of salvation. One reader took strong exception to this statement. He said that faith and obedience are like Siamese twins. If we separate them, we destroy both.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines condition as "anything called for as a requirement before the performance or completion of something else;... [a] prerequisite." In other words, A is a requirement that must be met in order for B to be completed.

So, is obedience a condition — a requirement — that we must meet before God can save us? Is God sitting up in heaven saying, "as soon as Marvin Moore obeys me (or starts to obey me), I will grant him my salvation?"

My response is No. Obedience is something that we do after we are saved, not what we do in order to be saved. And the reason is quite simple. While true obedience includes our outward deeds, it is not just our outward deeds. True obedience is both the outward deed and the inner motive that prompts the deed.

A man who refuses to have an affair has obeyed outwardly, but he has not obeyed the way God requires if he harbors sexual lust toward another person in his heart. That's what Jesus meant when he said "anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Matthew 5:28).

True obedience requires that we care enough about others to not want to have an affair.

Now, it happens that many unconverted people are able to restrain themselves from committing the outward act of adultery, and we are all glad for it. Their self-control makes for a well ordered society. However, they have not obeyed the biblical sense unless they have experienced the inner transformation we call

"conversion" or the "new birth." The only obedience that is acceptable to God is that which arises out of a converted heart.

And the point of this: salvation has to happen first, and only then is this kind of obedience possible.

Allow me to use an analogy. Let's say that, at the end of a hot summer day that I have spent working in my yard, I am all covered with sweat and dirt, and I want to take a shower and clean up. But suppose that the condition for getting in the shower in the first place was that I had to be clean. That wouldn't make sense! The shower is where I get clean, so being clean can't be a condition for getting in the shower.

In order to be saved, a person must be converted, and conversion is what makes true obedience possible. Unsaved people cannot truly obey God. Therefore, God cannot require a condition of salvation that people can do only after they've been saved.

The condition — the basis — for salvation is faith. The result of our salvation is obedience. Unsaved people can't obey. Saved people will obey.

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Are you a self-published Christian author?

Have you found it difficult getting your book distributed? If you agree that Jesus (Yeshua) is Lord and that salvation can be found only through repentance and faith in Him, I may be able to help you distribute your book. Go to partiallycensoredbooks.com/forchristianauthoronly and see what I can do for you.

Westby: "Last Man Standing," continued from page 5.

What was Cornelius praying for in his continuous prayers? His family? Well, God apparently answered those prayers for they too became God-fearers. Did he pray for his soldiers and servants under his command? Well, some of them had also become God-fearers.¹ Was he praying for his Gentile, pagan countrymen that they could come to know the One True God of Israel? Well, that was the prayer the angel of God came to answer.

Did Cornelius have a critical role in opening the door to more than ninety percent of the world's population? For sure. One man's actions, done faithfully, often anonymously, with selfless resolve and devotion, can have profound impact and be richly blessed by God.

We happen to know about Cornelius because the story was written by Luke and passed down in the New Testament. But there have been countless men and women like Cornelius that God has admired and used in their own circle of influence. He would like you and me to be among them.

There is an unknown "back story" to the Cornelius episode. It exists, but we don't know it. It involves perhaps many a "one man" or "one woman" that had a role in the life of Cornelius. Was it his mother that passed her faith on to her son as was the case with Timothy whose Christian mother taught him the Scriptures from his youth. Was it a grandmother or sister, or a traveling teacher? Maybe it was a fellow soldier that shared his faith with Cornelius. Maybe it was a faithful servant, a maid, or a devout Jewish neighbor whose worship of Yahweh caught the attention of Cornelius. Who brought to his attention the needs of the local impoverished Jewish families and inspired him to be a regular donor—possibly via the local synagogue—for distribution to the poor?

Somehow, somewhere, someone was key to introducing Cornelius to Israel's God. Did that woman or man know that their actions might change the world? Probably not, but does it matter? We do good because it is good and because we love to please God who is good. Whoever that key person was, he or she too is a hero of the faith. That person is unsung and unknown to us, but known to God and used by God. What else really matters?

You, a Power of One!

The Bible is likewise loaded with the stories of how one man or woman made a dramatic difference in moving God's plan forward. It is easy to read such stories—people like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Rahab, Samson, Deborah, Mary, John the Baptizer, and Jesus—and admire them, but not make the connection to yourself personally. With the exception of Jesus, now

exalted to God's heavenly throne, all these heroic characters are dead². They await the resurrection. But you and I are alive and available to be used of God

Used by God? How? Where? God expects us to do good as we are able, and do it right where we live. Jesus said that serving the true physical and spiritual needs of others was doing God's will and counts the same as serving the needs of Jesus himself.³ Our eternal reward will be measured by our righteous, selfless works of duty, love, and service.

This call to good works is universal to all God's children. One doesn't need an ordination or special commission to care for the genuine needs of family, brethren, or even strangers that come into one's life. Do we need someone to tell us to share our faith with people we are close to? Are not good works evidence of God's Spirit working in us? And the lack of good works is evidence of what? Jesus said, "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart..." (Lk. 6:45). God accomplishes much on this earth by using righteous, good people to bring forth their stored goodness to the physical and spiritual benefit of others.

God's book of heroes will not read like those of the popular culture. His heroes are largely unnoticed by the world for they seek not their own fame, but simply and quietly do good—often at personal sacrifice. Consider that such selfless heroism is part of your family history. Perhaps the greatest heroes are the unsung ones, the anonymous mothers and fathers who daily carry out God's decree to have families, protect and support them, and teach them right from wrong. Their stories will not make the history books, but they are noble nevertheless.

My Hero

I think of my mother Margit, God bless her memory, who determined she was going to keep her family together following the sudden death of my father in 1943. Here she was, a Norwegian immigrant like my father Clarence, with four young children to protect and care for and a heart full of grief.



Noah stood alone for God



Margit (Westby) Boganes at age 90

She and my dad had survived the Great Depression and they were coping with the rationing and shortages in wartime America. They had dreams of moving from Chicago to the Pacific Northwest after the war ended. They had heard that it looked much like their native Norway. Sadly, my father died before those dreams could be enjoyed. It was a surgical error during a routine goiter operation. Apologies to my mother were offered.

We were now poor but as kids didn't know it. My mother went to work doing heavy war work in a munitions factory. She hired an old lady to watch us after school until she came home from work. Her life was devoted to saving our family and keeping us all together, and that she did. After the war she followed her dream and moved us all to Seattle, bought a cheap house, worked hard, put herself through nursing school so she could earn a better wage and somehow provided for us. I don't know how she did it.

The last ten years of her life she lived with JoAn and me in a nice apartment we had made for her in our daylight basement. She said they were the happiest years of her life. She alone saved our family and kept us all together. She will always be an example of a true hero. She expressed her love by her selfless actions; she accepted her responsibility and did her duty with unwavering determination. And she managed to keep a cheerful, upbeat spirit that included her humming a happy tune in the kitchen every morning.

It couldn't have been easy for her, and I know she struggled during times of financial crisis and when faced with health problems. But soldier on she did. I must reveal that she was a woman of prayer. She told me how hard and long she prayed following my dad's death; praying for guidance, for protection, and blessings upon each of us kids, for the essentials to survive, and for God's strength. God heard and answered.

I believe that God heard the widow's prayers, saw her tears, and in his mercy called me and my siblings to know Him, the one true God. For that my mother is my hero.

All four of her children became Christians and have remained so through life. The four children she devoted so much of her life to "saving" have become a family of almost 60 (grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great, great-grandchildren) and increasing every year—the majority becoming Christians along the way. Can the actions of one person have profound life-changing effects upon many?

A New Crop of Heroes

Here is where you and I enter God's story line—his plan for us and our current world. You have the "power of one" to stand up for righteousness, actively do good works, and share the good news of the Kingdom of God.

You and I have the same hours in our day as have heroes of old. We can have a positive, life-changing impact upon our mates, children, neighbors, church, fellow workers, and our greater community. We are not little nobodies in a crowd, powerless Christians in a little church fellowship. We count, and we count with God. Our conduct and example affect those we encounter in daily life—potentially for great good if we choose to be a vessel of God.

Like a rock thrown into a pond, the wave rings move out in all directions. So our actions and example reach out touching people often unknown to us. Another metaphor is the scientific phenomena of the "butterfly effect" (a butterfly in Japan moves air that triggers other movement and ultimately a storm in the Pacific) where small acts can combine with the small acts of other righteous men and women to produce a mighty storm of righteousness.

To use yet another metaphor, that of sowing seeds, our good works are like scattered seeds that take root in unpredictable places. Usually we have long passed the scene when the seeds actually sprout and begin producing fruit.

Jesus recommended we do our good works privately and not with an eye for honor or payback. Jesus said, "your Father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (cf. Mt 6:1-4). Like the "back story" of the

Cornelius event, you may never know in this life the total effect of your good works done in God's name. In fact, they will continue beyond our lives. Consider that we today are reaping the benefits of the good works of Abraham and the apostles of Jesus.

God empowers the powerless if the powerless ask to be of service. Isaiah was afraid that he was too "unclean" for God to employ in His righteous work. God forgave his sins and then asked Isaiah if he was now ready to go to work. Isaiah said, "Send me."⁴ We can respond the same way.

You have power to stand for God. You are a human made in God's image. God didn't make you an inferior person. You have a hundred billion neurons (brains cells) linked by a hundred trillion connections woven into a convoluted three-dimensional brain architecture that supports the mind that is you—just like that in every other human. You are able if you are willing.

Paul said, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will **abound in every good work**. As it is written: 'He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.'" (2 Cor. 9:8-9, emphasis mine)

God is presently working with a new "crop" of potential heroes in the faith. God has made you in his image and gifted you with the power and ability to bring his gifts to those in need of physical and spiritual help. Be a messenger of God. Be a power of one. Be one who will always be standing for God and his goodness.

William Shakespeare expressed the ideal of what God created in man.

*What a piece of work is a man!
How noble in reason!
How infinite in faculty!
In form, in moving, how express and admirable!
In action, how like an angel!
In apprehension, how like a god!*

We do well to be such a man or woman in the service of God.

End Notes

1. Acts 10:7
2. Hebrews 11:13, 39
3. Matthew 25:34-46
4. Isaiah 6:5-9

Ken Westby is the founder and director of The Association for Christian Development (ACD) and is a director emeritus of the BSA. The ACD Web site is located at www.godward.org.

Morning Companion

Jerusalem and Babylon

America is a strange mix of Jerusalem and Babylon. So states the late Richard John Neuhaus in his book *American Babylon: Notes for a Christian Exile*. While acknowledging the religiously aware nature of the nation's founding and of its citizens, he reminds us that "America is Babylon not by comparison with other societies but by comparison with the radically new order sought by all who know love's grief in refusing to settle for a community of less than truth and justice compromised."

This, our union, is less perfect than the more perfect one that the Constitution envisions, and hence the people of God are in reality in a foreign land. But, if exiles we are, then what is our role as the people of God in a foreign land?

In about 600 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, removed the people of God from their own land and transported them to a land of exile. The prophet Jeremiah, still in Jerusalem, gave a bit of advice in the form of a "thus saith the Lord:" Build houses, start families, create businesses. You are going to be in a strange land for a long time. Most of all, "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7 NASB). If in fact we are pilgrims and sojourners on the earth, exiles in the American Babylon, Jeremiah's message to his exiled people is a good message for us as well. The city's prosperity is our prosperity. The city's peace is our peace. Its welfare is our welfare. As citizens of both the higher kingdom and the earthly one we must do whatever we can to make this Babylon a better place for all who inhabit it so that it can be a better place for us too.

This comports well with the New Testament admonition to be salt and light to the world. It also brings into a clearer picture Jesus' statement that we should render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. We might argue about what is Caesar's and what is God's—that at the core defines much of the political discourse in the American Babylon today—but it does give us the freedom, indeed, the obligation to participate in the life of the city, provided we remember that our true citizenship is in the New Jerusalem and that we conduct ourselves accordingly. That's why becoming involved in town hall events to strive for the welfare of the city is lawful, assuming we conduct ourselves lawfully. It's why standing for the values of Jerusalem and working for the welfare of city is consistent with who we should be. It means easing the path for others, being generous to a fault, ministering to the needy, and conducting ourselves with a kindness and openness that will reflect the life of Christ.

It means standing for justice for the weak and helpless even when the political winds blow otherwise and doing what we must to secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity by not selling our inheritance for the short term economic gain for a few. In short, it's completely acceptable for people of faith to have our voices heard in the public square to defend our values in this American Babylon, for exiles are to work for the welfare of the city.

—Lenny Cacchio (<http://morningcompanion.blogspot.com>)

Putting Faith in God First

Artur Aleksandrov's Courageous Story

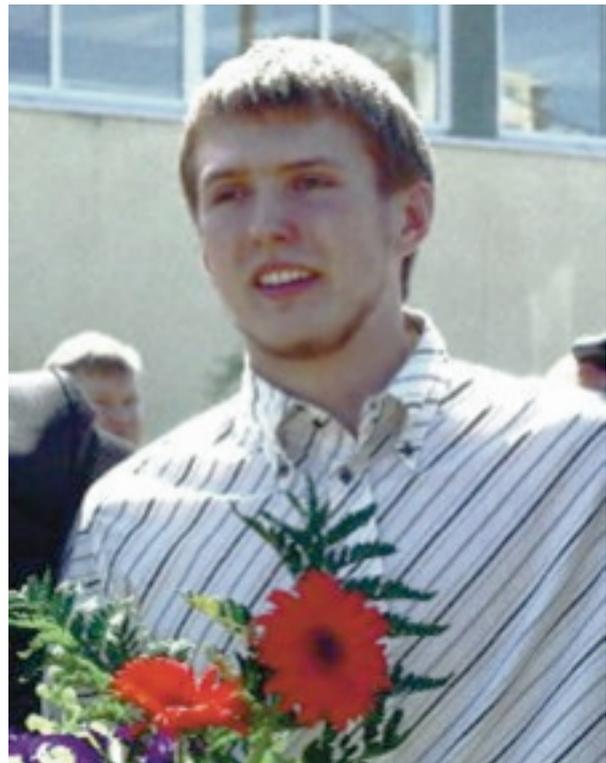
Artur Aleksandrov lives in Tallinn, Estonia. He has been reading the *Good News* magazine for about two years.

This June Artur graduated from high school, but it was not easy. He had important exams to take, some of which had to be taken on the Sabbath Day. If not taken, he would not be able to graduate, and worse, he would be denied admission for further education and look at a bleak future. This did not dissuade Artur. He put God first, and God responded and blessed him mightily. The words below are Artur's. We found them inspiring as we hope you will, too.

Now that the more important things related to school are behind me, I am sitting down to tell you how it all went and how our shared Lord constantly blessed me through this time.

As you know, just recently I was a high school senior, trying his best to balance school, God and various "cares of this life." When the new year started, I wanted to focus on picking the right national exams to take. When I decided on which ones I prefer, it didn't even come to mind that one of them could fall on the Sabbath. By nature, being rather forgetful and slow, I didn't notice the day of the week I was to sit for the first two exams (both were on the Sabbath). I lived on unsuspectingly until, about three weeks before the first exam, one of my teachers casually mentioned something that made my pupils triple in diameter. That's when it hit me!

I informed the teacher about the situation and asked if I could maybe do it on another time. She said that I'd have to ask for permission from the National Examination Center. The people at the center are the ones that create and check the exam materials; they also arrange a second time to sit for the exam(s) for those that, due to serious reasons, couldn't take the exam(s) at the standard appointed time. My teacher told me that my only hope was that the second dates for exams don't fall on Saturdays. I looked up when the additional time for exams would be and found relief. This was the first blessing from God — that the additional exams weren't on the Sabbath — and it saved me a whole year of my life. I could complete the exams this year, but had to hurry with asking the center to allow me to take them.



Artur Aleksandrov on graduation day

I wrote a letter of request to the center explaining my affiliation with a Sabbath-keeping church and then I started to wait. They tested my faith and patience for a whole month before I got a reply on May 5. They also requested an affirmation from the church as proof, which Mr. Lambert duly composed for me. They respected my beliefs, and although my request came way too late, allowed me sit for the exams on the additional time appointed by them. This was another blessing from God. It was an answer to numerous of my prayers

Littrell: "The Great I AM," cont. from page 13.

trust God in every event that transpires between my birth into this world and my departure from it. I do know Him as the great "I Am".

The Great I AM

He created heaven, He made earth, He made the light.
He told the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night.
He made mighty rivers flow, He made the mountains tall.
And every living creature and the man who ruled them all.
And when He saw that what He made was working like it should,
He made an observation and He said "It was good."
Looking through the scriptures I can see He wasn't through.
He said I am the Great I Am and there's nothing I can't do.
He could heal the blinded eyes and make the lame to walk.
He could make the deaf to hear and make the dumb to talk.

He never stopped at anything that got into His way.
He's still in charge and in control of all He made today.
He's the God who made the universe,
Put the stars in space.
He's still working miracles,
I can see them all over the place.
Not just the God who one time did,
He's the God who does.
That's why they call Him the Great I Am,
Not the great I Was.
He can move the mountain with the sound of just His voice.
He can stop the sun or moon if it becomes His choice.
He's the great Physician when they've given up on you.
He's just getting started when they've done all they can do.
He's the God of Moses, He's the God of Abraham,
He's the one and only God, He's the Great I Am.

Arthur unknown

Dr. Terril D. Littrell is a retired pastor with over forty years of experience in teaching and ministry. He and his wife Chloe live in Cleveland, Tennessee.

to Him while I was still awaiting the reply from the center. In that period, I was partly preparing to receive a negative answer, which meant failing to graduate and staying for another year in school, and partly really hoping that God would still provide an easier way out. I knew he could - and he did!

June 21 was my graduation day, and I still ponder about how much of a blessing that extra month for preparation had been. People here are lamenting about how difficult this year's English national exam was. On the other hand, the English exam that was prepared for the additional time (the one I took) wasn't that hard at all! Actually, our group heard the listening part four times because the stereo kept getting jammed and the audio kept on repeating. So it could even be added that we — the "second group"— had a great advantage! Also, on my Estonian exam, where we had to write a 600 word essay, I was blessed with several topics that I could actually relate to — I chose 'Forgotten value's and got a score of 8/10 for it. This is very good by my standards.

Overall, the results I got for my exams were a bit higher than what I was expecting. Even the day of my graduation ceremony turned out to be a blessing, against all odds. I remember how my homeroom teacher told me in a surprised tone that this year's

graduation ceremony will be held on a Sunday. She said that in previous years it had always been on Saturdays! I don't think that's a coincidence.

So, dear brethren, as you can see for yourselves, our Gracious and All powerful Lord responded to our collective prayers with abundant gifts. I want to, again, thank you all for your brotherly goodwill and asking on my behalf. There is nothing more powerful in this world than the prayers of God's servants — his saints. I hope that I am on the road to becoming one myself. I appreciate you being there for me. When an opportunity presents itself, I'd be more than happy to help you as you have helped me.

Meanwhile, I am left here, in a spiritually left behind Estonia, trying to fulfill the purpose for which the Father drew me. What I see happening in my life is encouraging - it is my wish to become one of the pillars in God's church in Estonia, so that as God calls more people into His Church, they'll have someone to turn to for answers and encouragement.

—Artur

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The Church in the World

Soccer group tells Brazil's superstars “Keep God out of football”

By Michael Ireland
Chief Correspondent, ASSIST News Service

UNITED KINGDOM (ANS) — The soccer world's governing body — FIFA (The Fédération Internationale de Football Association) — has sparked controversy after disciplining the Brazilian team for overt displays of Christianity during a match.

AC Milan soccer star Kaka and his Brazilian teammates have been told to stop making overt displays of their Christianity during matches.

Stars including £56 million pounds sterling (\$91.5 million USD) Real Madrid forward Kaka and captain Lucio revealed T-shirts with devout slogans such as “I Belong to Jesus” and “I Love God” during the Confederations Cup final last month.

According to Daniel King, writing for Britain's *Daily Mail* newspaper (www.dailymail.co.uk), FIFA has now risked accusations of being 'anti-religious' by reminding Brazil of its guidelines banning players from making displays of a personal, religious or political nature on the football pitch.

King reports that a warning letter was sent to the Brazilian football federation “to remind them of the relevant regulations, so that such incidents do not recur in the future.”

The newspaper reports that Brazilian players, and Kaka in particular, are well-known for their strong religious beliefs and the squad and backroom staff formed a large circle and sank to their knees in prayer after the victory over the US at the end of last month.

In the subsequent team photographs, many players were wearing the Christian T-shirts, with captain Lucio prominent as he lifted the trophy, the newspaper said.

In his article, King says: “But Brazil's display of faith had an extra element of controversy because most of the players are Pentecostals, whose leaders have been accused of violating religious freedom by attacking those of other faiths.

“In the light of Brazil's high-profile display of faith, seen around the world by millions of television viewers, the head



Source: Dreamstime.com

of football in Denmark wants all religious statements banned from football.”

Jim Stjerne Hansen, secretary general of the Danish football association, said: “Just as we reject political manifestations, we should also say no to religious ones. There are too many risks involved in clubs, for example, with people of different religious faiths.”

King explains that FIFA rules specifically ban the use of T-shirts or other undergarments, but there is nothing that outlaws prayer or other displays of religious belief. Law 4, which deals with players' equipment, reads: “Players must not reveal undergarments showing slogans or advertising. The basic compulsory equipment must not have any political, religious or personal statements.”

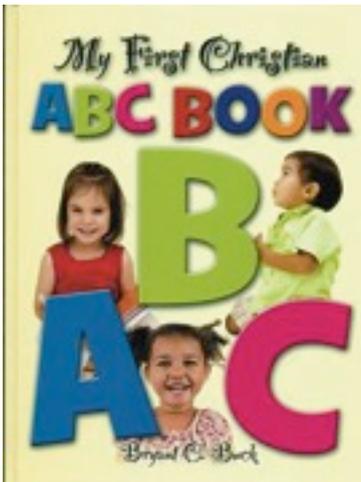
Brazil has escaped sanction, just as they did following a similar display of T-shirts after their 2005 Confederations Cup win, but football has made its intention clear to keep religion, as well as politics, out of sport, King reported.

According to its website, FIFA is an association governed by Swiss law founded in 1904 and based in Zurich. It has 208 member associations and its goal, enshrined in its statutes, is the constant improvement of football.

FIFA employs some 310 people from over 35 nations and is composed of a Congress (legislative body), Executive Committee (executive body), General Secretariat (administrative body) and committees (assisting the Executive Committee).

Michael Ireland, Chief Correspondent of ANS, is an international British freelance journalist who was formerly a reporter with a London (United Kingdom) newspaper and has been a frequent contributor to UCB Europe, a British Christian radio station. Michael has traveled to Albania and the former Yugoslavia, Holland, Germany and the former Czechoslovakia, Israel, and Canada. He has reported for ANS from Jordan, China, Russia, Jamaica, Mexico, and Nicaragua. Michael's volunteer involvement with ASSIST News Service is a sponsored ministry department—Michael Ireland Media Missionary (MIMM)—of A.C.T. International of P.O.Box 1649, Brentwood, TN 37024-1649, at: Artists in Christian Testimony (A.C.T.) International where you can donate online to support his stated mission of “Truth Through Christian Journalism.”

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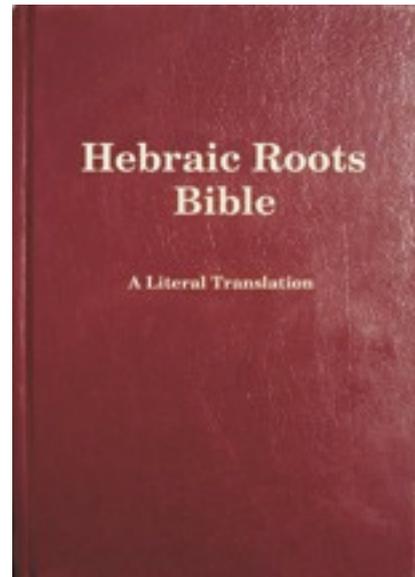
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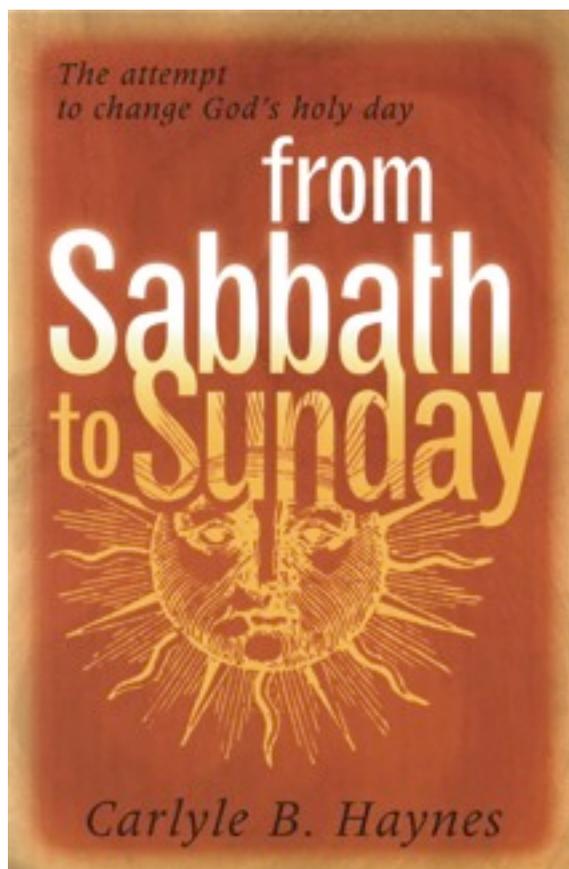
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