



THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

The official newspaper of The Church of God International

Vol. 43, No. 3

“Put on the whole armor of God”

Fall 2022

Were the Ten Commandments in Force Before Moses?

by Mike James



One argument critics make about our belief in following God’s law is that the law was only for the nation of Israel or the Jews. These folks believe the law was given to Moses so therefore the law was only for that nation at that time.

I once had a conversation with a Jehovah’s Witness about this and the Witness I spoke with was making this argument. I mentioned to the Witness that Moses learned about the Sabbath before God ever gave him the law at Sinai. The Witness disagreed with me, but then I showed him **Exodus 16**, which discusses God making Israel aware of the Sabbath before Moses received the law from God at Sinai, which is discussed in **Exodus 20**. The next time the Witness came back to visit me he brought an elder with him to discuss things with me.

I remember in my early years in the Church of God this was an important truth I learned when I realized there is evidence in the Bible of the law being in force prior to Moses and the nation of Israel. This also makes sense because of the statement Jesus made in **Matthew 5:17–19** that the law will not be removed until heaven and earth are finished. Obviously, heaven and earth are still in existence since Jesus made that statement. I think it is also important to recognize that after Jesus returns to this earth the law will be enforced (**Zechariah 14:16–17; Micah 4:1–2**). So God’s law remains in force. But what about before Moses received the law? Let’s look at this evidence so we can make others aware of it should we have that opportunity.

Beginning in **Genesis 4:7**, we read that sin was near to Cain. Now **1John 3:4** defines sin as the transgression of God’s law. So what was the sin that Cain committed? The next few verses (**Genesis 4:8–12**) tell the story. Cain killed his brother Abel. Of course, “Do not murder!” is one of the Ten Commandments. So we see the concept of not murdering is around prior to Moses receiving the law from God.

Now notice **Genesis 7:2, 8** and **8:20**. Here we read about the distinction between clean and unclean animals. Noah has an awareness of the distinction between clean and unclean animals long before the law was delivered to Moses in **Leviticus 11**. Also note in **Genesis 8:20** that Noah uses only clean animals to offer sacrifices. This is also something we read about in the law given to Moses.

In **Leviticus 1–7**, we read about details concerning the laws given to Moses on various offerings. Only “clean” animals like oxen, cattle, sheep, and goats were permitted. Doves and young pigeons (also clean birds) could be used for poor people who could not afford larger animals.

In **Genesis 13:13** we learn that the people of Sodom were also great sinners. **Genesis 18:20** tells us their sin was exceedingly grave. Finally, in **Genesis 19:4–5**, we read one of their sins was to practice homosexual sex. Later when Moses receives the law from God, sin of this type is addressed by God in **Leviticus 20:13**.

Another interesting scripture is found in **Genesis**

14:20. This is the episode of Abraham’s visit to Melchizedek, the priest of Salem. During his visit Abraham brings a tithe to this priest of God. Where did Abraham get the knowledge of a tithe offering? This is another law we find later when Moses receives the law from God. The law on tithing given to Moses is addressed in **Leviticus 27:30–34; Deuteronomy 12; and Deuteronomy 14:12–29**. The story of Abraham later provides more evidence about a knowledge of God’s law prior to the covenant at Sinai.

In **Genesis 20:1–5**, we read the story of Abraham entering the land of Gerar. Because of his concern that the king might kill him and take his wife Sarah, Abraham does not tell the whole truth about his relationship with Sarah. He tells the people of Gerar that Sarah is his sister—which she was (half-sister)—but he fails to mention he is married to her. The king of Gerar takes Sarah to be with him, but a dream from God makes the King aware of his mistake.

The important point to note here is the King seems to be aware of the sin of adultery when he returns Sarah to Abraham. The story seems to also imply that Abraham’s failure to speak honestly about his relationship with Sarah was not a good idea. By not being completely honest, Abraham almost led the King of Gerar into breaking two of the Ten

experience in Egypt. When Potiphar’s wife tries to have sex with Joseph he flees the room knowing this would be a sin and act of adultery. How would Joseph have knowledge of this unless this information was available to people living at that time?

The reason I mention Enoch is because of the language used in **Genesis 5** about him. Scripture relates that Enoch “walked with God.” When we compare him to the other names in **Genesis 5** we see that Scripture seems to imply Enoch lived his life in a different way than the other men around in his time. When we add **Hebrews 11:5** to our information on Enoch we see Enoch is listed with the other people of faith in the Old Testament—men like Abraham, Noah, Abel, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. We have specific examples that most of these men were obedient to God’s laws. If we read between the lines scripture would seem to imply that Enoch followed God’s law as he understood it.

One other interesting point to keep in mind pertains to Adam and Eve. Note in **Genesis 2:17** Adam and Eve were admonished not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil or they would die. If we reflect on that in relation to **Romans 6:23** we may speculate about some other possibilities. Since the wages of sin is death in **Romans 6:23**, did Adam and Eve sin by eating from the forbidden tree? Were they committing idolatry by putting their own ideas and the influence of the serpent above God? Did they have more information from God than Scripture provides on the law? Something to think about.

Now some will argue that there is no specific scripture that the other patriarchs kept God’s law like Abraham did, but there is no scripture that says they did not. Having an awareness of some of God’s law leads me to believe that they were aware of other aspects of the law. We can debate this, but let’s remember the Bible was not written for us to get our pet ideas proven. The Bible was written as a guide to mankind.

Finally, let us not forget about God making Israel aware of His Sabbath law through the miracles of the manna and the quails in **Exodus 16**. Again, this information is provided to Moses and the people of Israel

prior to Moses formally receiving the law from God on Mt. Sinai.

We also have mention about the Sabbath way back in **Genesis 2:3**. There God blesses and hallows the seventh day long before Moses receives information about the Sabbath law. But when God does give the Sabbath commandment to Moses (**Exodus 20:11**) He mentions resting and hallowing the day back when He created things in **Genesis 1**.

Scripture reports God is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Scripture also provides evidence that God’s law has been in existence from the beginning and will not fade till heaven and earth pass away. I advise we meditate on, study, and keep God’s law.

Sources

“Tabernacle Offerings,” by Jack Zavada, November 7, 2018, learnreligions.com

The NIV Study Bible, Zondervan, 1985



Commandments Moses would later receive from God (**Exodus 20:14, 17**).

One of the most important scriptures in the Old Testament dealing with this subject is **Genesis 26:5**. This scripture tells us that Abraham kept God’s laws, commandments, and statutes. From the context of this it is much more than just the Ten Commandments. This is long before Moses is ever on the scene. The implication of this scripture is that God’s law must have been made known to Abraham in order for him to follow it. That leads to further implications that Jacob, Joseph, Adam, Eve, Cain, Enoch, Noah, and others retained knowledge of God’s law to some degree.

Note **Genesis 35:2** mentioning Jacob telling his household to rid themselves of the foreign gods they had. These were most likely idols used in pagan worship (**Genesis 31:19**). Here Jacob seems to have an awareness of the first two commandments.

Once again, in **Genesis 39** we read about Joseph’s

What Is Mankind's Option for Survival?

Since the Garden of Eden human beings have been trying to live peaceably with each other. But that peace was derailed when Cain murdered Able, and since then, over a period of thousands of years, mankind has been killing himself in a variety of ways. What is the solution to this madness?

by Bill Watson



Humanity consistently struggles with how to live peaceably with his fellow man. The apostle Paul claims, "Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they [mankind] not known..." (Romans 3:16–17).

However, Paul immediately identifies a "root cause" to this persistent challenge and explains it in the next verse. He says: "There is *no fear of God* before their eyes" (Romans 3:18).

This void—this missing attribute—in our human character is a major obstacle that needs to be overcome if human populations stand any chance of achieving peace with each other. And this lack of "fear," or *respect*, for God is primarily due to some *common flaws* in our character that so often get in the way of obtaining this peace we all so desperately desire and want. **Do you know what they are?**

The apostle John plainly states three major common flaws that underpin our inability to obtain peace: "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." These three, says John, are "NOT of the Father" but are "of the world" (1 John 2:16). These three *general categories*—these "windows of weakness"—are root causes that *prevent peace* in the lives of so many people in the world. It's very unfortunate, but sadly true, that these three "character imperfections" are all-pervasive and are the root cause of estrangement among families, friends, associates, and on the larger geopolitical scale, nations of the world. They even contribute to the perversion of one's natural, otherwise healthy, self-esteem.

Observing and Analyzing These Character Flaws

As we take time to view the global landscape it becomes rather obvious these "three accesses" into

our *human nature* do indeed cause all of us some difficulty in our relationships, as well as the geopolitical arrangements throughout the globe. So often these accesses present "temptations" designed to *exploit circumstances* at the expense of others for *self-gain* when they're not managed maturely for the benefit of the greater whole. Notice what James says: "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust [of the flesh, eyes, or pride/vanity], and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death" (James 1:14–15).

The apostle James continues and explains how this works: "From where come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members [our flesh, eyes, and pride/vanity]? You lust, and have not: you kill [envy], and desire to have, and cannot obtain; you fight and war; yet you have not, because you ask not. You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts [pleasures]" (James 4:1–3). Essentially, James is saying *selfishness* is at the center of many of our disturbances, agitations, and divisions. It's at the root of many conflicts that result in separation and estrangement.

These scriptures begin to layout for us what many times cause our animosity, disagreements, tension, and ultimately, divisive actions. We are lustful and envious to get and obtain things, or achieve and/or protect our positions that provide privileges, which allow us to consume whatever it may be for our own pleasures, or vanity. Our eyes, flesh, and the pride in ourselves—our vanity—can be very blinding to what and how we are actually acting and pursuing an agenda and can drive us for personal gain and/or control—sometimes, even at the expense of *hurting others!*

Consider that from the time a human being is born, it's all about satisfying the self. A newborn is very

demanding and can become very selfish, manipulative, and controlling if not "reared" in the ways of courtesy, consideration, and care. Clearly, many parents today are not taking the time to educate and train their children to respect the law and other people's property and trust the authorities that enforce the rules and laws. Too many are "turned out to pasture" to fend for themselves, only to find sources that are less than honorable and advocate hurting, stealing, disrespecting, and destroying the belongings of others. This is at the heart of what James is talking about.

Consider today's leadership of nations and the political gridlock being experienced, especially here in the USA, resulting from selfish misdirection, disinformation, and reprobate guidance—and for what? Party politics? It's sometimes so embarrassing that you can hardly believe the child-like immaturity displayed among these allegedly highly educated adults! This unfortunately reinforces the *distrust* in much of our leadership and institutions that once were held in such high and honorable esteem!

This also results in *avoidance of addressing the issues* by those attempting to maintain a particular posture for the sake of their political party or of their own self-promotion. They wish to avoid criticism in order to preserve their leadership role. Consider for a moment the fact that the United States has just appointed a female Supreme Court Justice that *cannot define* what a woman is! *How is that kind of nonsense acceptable?* It is also **now confirmed** that the disgusting information coming out from Hunter Biden's laptop and the revelation of his business and salacious shenanigans *are legitimate* and unlike originally portrayed as "conspiracy," is *now shocking*

**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE:
November 15, 2022**

Submissions may be sent to
vancestinson@cgi.org



Las Vegas, Nevada, a desert metropolis built largely on the lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, and pride of life, has drawn millions of visitors and trillions of dollars in wealth to southern Nevada. Shown here are the Bellagio Fountains and traffic on South Las Vegas Boulevard.

THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

3900 TIMMS ST., TYLER, TX 75701

THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS is the official newspaper of The Church of God International. World headquarters, Tyler, Texas, USA. Copyright © 2021 The Church of God International. All rights reserved.

Editor: Vance A. Stinson

Contributing Writers: Michelle Algarra, W. Adam Boyd, Jeff Flanick, Mike James, George Roper, Bill Watson

Production: Vance A. Stinson

Business Manager: Benny Sharp

NOTICE: *The International News* welcomes submissions of articles, features, church news, pictures, or manuscripts. However, it cannot be responsible for the return of unsolicited materials. Materials may be sent through the postal service, but electronic submissions are preferred.

INTERNATIONAL OFFICES:

- Australia: The Church of God International, PO Box 171, Boonah, Queensland 4310, Australia
- The Church of God International Canada, PO Box 32009–RPO, Northland, London ON N5V 5K
- Jamaica: The Church of God International, 60 Cairncurran Ave., Western Dist. PO, St. Andrew, Kingston, Jamaica
- The Church of God International, Philippines, P.O. Box 2450 MCPO Makati City 1264 Philippines; email: cgiphils@yahoo.com
- Africa: Kenya: Migori Town Oruba Village, Osingo Aego Village, Ndhwa, Isbania-Mwita, Kisii; Email: zablonyumba@gmail.com and cgikenya@yahoo.com

CGI Website: www.cgi.org
CGI E-mail: info@cgi.org
Phone: (903) 939-2929

most of us that this is real! Why hasn't he been arrested and indicted?

Compound that with Ghislaine Maxwell's disclosure of names and mountains of video evidence revealing "highly influential" men and women participating in and guilty of statutory rape—and shockingly, not one of these powerful and famous political or business leaders, movie stars, or educators have been arrested, indicted, and convicted! How does this happen? Where is the outrage? Who is protecting these people? And what is really behind the "curtain" that these leaders and elitists don't want us, the people, to know about them? What evil has been perpetrated?

It's obvious: if the truth were to come out, as it has about Mr. Hunter Biden, Anthony Weiner, Bernie Madoff, and so many others, this would be extremely embarrassing and ruin their images and positions of influence, as was done to some of the above mentioned men—and now, most recently, Prince Andrew. Frankly, it should lead to the conviction and incarceration of ALL those participants!

And so, the "pride of life" becomes the motivating factor to secure their roles and reputations so they can continue to serve the people in their vanity and be selfishly benefited, even at the expense of causing others continued suffering and loss. Presently, the United States is agonizing and languishing from misappropriated policies that are igniting inflation, interest rates, energy co-dependence, and the dilution of American culture due to immigration policies that are weak in managing restriction and restraint!

What appears to be happening is we have been given "children to be their princes [leaders] and babes [immature leaders] shall rule over them.... As for my people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths" (Isaiah 3:4–12). Hosea the prophet cry's out in confirmation of Isaiah's observations and



CALEXICO, CA—A group of migrants trying to illegally cross the border from Mexico to the U.S. float down the polluted New River late at night on June 14, 2006 in Calexico, California.

claims; "Hear the word of the LORD, you children of Israel: For the LORD has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land [USA/Canada/U.K.], because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood touches blood [violence, riots, crime, murder, rape, and robbery].... Therefore shall you fall in the day.... My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because you have rejected knowledge [of the God of Israel], I will also reject you, that you...seeing you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children" (Hosea 4:1–6).

Never in our lifetime have we seen such negligence of law enforcement. The conditions surrounding the borders of the United States are now being

characterized as an *INVASION!* The smuggling of fentanyl, meth, and other drugs is out of control. And much of this is due to the Cartel dominating the human trafficking, drug, and weapons smuggling industry!

In the meantime, government policies are weaponizing specific segments of the government, to reduce the rule of law—and the increasing crime rate substantiates this fact—"blood touches blood"—random violence is now common in many of the western cities of the USA, Britain, and Europe, due to the lack of law enforcement!

Sadly, accountability appears to be M.I.A. It seems, especially in the USA, some attorney generals and DAs are not inclined to indict and prosecute. Instead, we see areas of the United States where



CIUDAD ACUNA, MEXICO—Mounted U.S. Border Patrol agents watch Haitian immigrants on the bank of the Rio Grande in Del Rio, Texas on September 20, 2021 as seen from Ciudad Acuna, Mexico.



Convicted sex-offenders Ghislaine Maxwell and Jeffrey Epstein

criminals are released as fast as they are arrested. Having discussions and negotiating in a *civil manner* to work out differences of opinions seem to be a lost tactic. Just take a moment to consider the Russian-Ukraine war! Current estimates are between 5 and 8 million people have left the country of Ukraine as refugees—victims of war—and the lives of vast numbers, both Russians and Ukrainians, have been totally upended, generating personal setbacks that may never be recovered in their lifetimes! The loss of homes, jobs, careers, friends, and family members who have died or been killed is devastating—the toll of war is unfathomable for all who participate in it!

Yet, due to *selfish pride and the lusts of the flesh and eyes*, mankind continues to fight against his fellowman for gains *he selfishly believes* are best suited for the greater whole, never considering the negative and heartbreaking effects of expressing violent force, unreasonable demands, or immoral expectations against his fellowman. And much of this is due to the *lack of a common standard, as opposed to selfish ideologies!*

And therein lies “humanities dilemma”—a *common ideology* that all nations and people could get behind, embrace, and support. This is what has challenged mankind since Satan introduced to Eve the temptations of her flesh, eyes, and her desire (her pride/vanity) to be like God (Genesis 3:4–6). The result of this confrontation generated a distrust toward God that humanity has yet to overcome—and mankind’s differing ideologies, beliefs, and rebellion against God cause much of this hostility and animosity. This constant violent struggle throughout human history is a testament to this reality! However, the *GOOD NEWS is*: a time is coming in the future where all men of good will, will indeed, finally live in

peace with each other!

What and When Is This Time of Peace?

The prophets have been proclaiming this *GOOD NEWS* for millennia in their writings. Jesus Christ Himself also announced He came to proclaim and reinforce this prophetic message of God’s Kingdom. Notice: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel [good news] to the poor...To preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18–19). Mark writes: “Now after that John [the Baptist] was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the *gospel of the kingdom of God*. And saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the *kingdom of God* is at hand: repent you, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:14–15).

All throughout the Bible we are assured God has a plan and He is working this plan to a peaceful conclusion. However, God is committed to reveal humanity is completely incapable of achieving peace apart from His influence. This unfortunately is why so much pain, suffering, alienation, and destruction *must be experienced!* There is just no other way to convince mankind he is *totally inept—completely unqualified*—without letting him *experience the failure*.

Lamentably, for humanity, due to his stubborn pride and vanity, things will have to come to a precipice that can only be defined as *catastrophically horrific*—so horrific that if those days weren’t shorten, no flesh would be left alive (Matthew 24:22; Mark 13:20)! Clearly, this threatening trajectory that mankind is on puts the whole world in *existential jeopardy*. If Jesus Christ does not come back to rescue humanity from self-destruction, your Bible says we (humanity) would become extinct—totally obliterated!

But, the *GOOD NEWS is*, Christ is on a countdown from heaven, and God has not gone off somewhere leaving us without His direct oversight of our condition—He is still on His throne, and Jesus Christ is at His right hand, alive and prepared to return!

So, *conversely*, God cares about humanity very much—He loves us—and wants all people to be given eternal life. And though it may seem He is slack in fulfilling His promise, *this is not true*. Notice: “The LORD is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering [patient] to us-ward [mankind], not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). *This is His agenda!* To provide as much time for as many to “wake up” to the reality of what God is actually working on—what His plan really is for humanity! We have such an awesome future that it isn’t worthy to be compared to anything in this world (Romans 8:18).

In Hebrews we read a very interesting statement to this effect regarding God’s method and how He’s

bringing many sons and daughters to eternal life. Notice: “But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man that you are mindful of him [ref. Job 7:17].... You made him a little lower than the angels...and did set him [mankind] over the works of your hands [ref. Genesis 1:27–31]. You have put all things in subjection under his [mankind’s] feet.... he left nothing that is not put under him. But now [currently, at this time] we see *not yet* all things put under him [mankind]. But [instead] we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man...To make the captain of their [mankind’s] salvation perfect through suffering” (Hebrews 2:6–10).

Yes, Jesus Christ has qualified as the Savior of mankind and has been given the authority by the Father to have the power over death (John 5:25–29). Christ has been empowered to resurrect us from the dead and give us a new, glorified body that will not degrade or become weak with age. We will be given, upon His return, bodies that will be *unlimited in power and capability* over the physical world and provide us with the abilities to rebuild the waste places. It will be our task, as the prophets proclaimed, to prepare the world for the rest of the dead (Amos 9:13–15; Isaiah 61:4–6)!

Notice in Revelation what John tells us about our future and what God is engineering—how He is steering us to His ultimate *PEACEFUL* conclusion that will finally result in a *peaceful solution* for all humanity. Notice: “And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. and he laid hold on the dragon...which is the devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years...and shut him up and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.... and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus...and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither received his mark...and they [today’s Christians] lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead [those that never had the chance to accept Christ as their Savior—the non-Christian] lived not again until the thousand years were finished: This is the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:1–5).

During this thousand year period the earth will go through a major rebuilding transformation, with Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords (Zechariah 14). He will rule the earth from Jerusalem with those resurrected upon His return at the beginning of the thousand years; remodeling the planet into a type of Garden of Eden (Ezekiel 36:33–36) to prepare it for the resurrection of the rest of the dead at the end of the thousand years. It’s at that time all human beings will be given a chance to accept Christ as their personal Savior and have opportunity to be awarded entry into the spirit world and consequently, into eternity.

Interestingly enough, after this there will be a new heaven and a new earth at that time. New Jerusalem will come down from heaven to earth, and God the Father will “*TABERNACLE*” with man from that day forward. He will wipe away all the tears. There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, and no more pain! All will be made new (Revelation 21:1–5)! And “*peace on Earth*” will finally be accomplished!

What a wonderful future! And yes, it is yours to have if only you will dedicate your life to following the example of Jesus Christ and work to overcome those three “character flaws” embedded in our nature. We are assured this future of eternity is ours if only we will fight the good fight of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ! “He that overcomes shall inherit ALL THINGS: and I will be his God, and he [that’s you and me] shall be my son” (Revelation 21:7).



KUNG FU FIGHTING

by Jeff Flanick



In the early 1970s, Kung Fu was the preeminent martial art to exhibit influence on popular western culture. Bruce Lee movies, as well as the popular television show *Kung Fu*, starring David “Grasshopper” Carradine, grabbed top rankings in their respective entertainment arenas. “Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting” by Carl Douglas was a worldwide smash hit on the radio. Interest in Karate, Judo, and other assorted martial arts blossomed, resulting in the opening of many new studios specializing in these ancient skills. Millions of people suddenly wanted to learn and practice this “newly discovered” sport via clubs and lessons. I apologize to any reader of my generation who now has that kitschy song stuck in their head. While the song is dated and nostalgic, it does bring back fond memories of my childhood listening to Cleveland’s AM superstation, WIXY 1260. As someone who was never exposed to education and training in the martial arts, I never had the opportunity to learn what the different names for each style of a particular martial art meant to convey or describe. The term “Kung Fu” in the original Chinese did not specifically refer to sports or martial arts (although today in common parlance it in fact does so). A quick search for Kung Fu on Wikipedia reveals that the term refers to any study, learning, or practice that requires patience, energy, and time to complete. More succinctly put, Kung Fu translates into *time and effort*. Superior levels of achievement in Kung Fu (or in any enterprise for that matter) take commensurate expenditures of time and effort to obtain.

Time and effort are essential components in our walk with God and His ways. As with any skill, there are no shortcuts to success. Admittedly, some people are born with greater talents or natural abilities in particular areas of endeavor. Some individuals are gifted with incredible hand-eye coordination which is advantageous in sporting competition, impeccable

musical timing, photographic-like memories or mathematical proficiencies to name just a few such unique personal attributes. An individual’s aptitude in spiritual discernment, as well as the initial “starting point” in navigating one’s journey toward the goal of spiritual “completion” (often translated as “perfection” in the third chapter of Paul’s epistle to the Philippians, whereby Paul describes his quest for fullness in knowing (and striving to act like) Christ are unique.

Practice is a critical component necessary to achieve great things. In many martial arts, different colored belts are awarded to practitioners based upon the level of skill obtained through practice. Highly acclaimed masters of Kung Fu receive great instruction, have a good team to work with, and most notably, dedicate countless hours of their time to training and practice. Masters must learn and perfect fundamentals, or at least *strive* to reach perfection, if they truly want to reach the top of their sport. Likewise, those of us striving to walk along God’s spiritual path—trying as best we can to emulate our Master Jesus Christ, Yeshua Messiah—must receive great instruction and have a solid team to participate alongside with on our journey. Most importantly, we *must* expend the proper time and effort needed to reach our goal. Although perfection will not be obtained in this life, we should at least continually be *striving* to improve our spiritual thoughts, outlook, and actions. In Matthew 16:24, we read: “Then Jesus told His disciples, “If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (Berean Study Bible, BSB). After Christ’s resurrection, He says the following in Matthew 28:19–20: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (BSB). We should not be overly content with the progress we have made in our spiritual walk. Growth is not necessarily linear, nor is it always in a positive

direction. Deep within our core being, however, we must not only desire but continually *labor* to follow Christ’s command of obedience to His will and His way. We should not be satisfied with whatever color “belt” we have obtained thus far. Perhaps (considering your current level of discernment) you have “mastered” your diet appropriately with regard to clean and unclean meats, or have given up working on the Sabbath, for example. You attend services regularly, and dedicate time to prayer and Bible study. These are all good things, things our Master Messiah expects us to do. Yet, there is *always* room for improvement. There are *always* refinements to be made, as well as additional parts of our character to work on that we may currently be ignorant of. Perhaps, we are not being as charitable as we should be. Maybe we struggle at times with having a spirit of genuine forgiveness or with controlling our anger. Matthew 7:3 comes to mind, as Christ states: “Why do you look at the speck in your brother’s eye, but fail to notice the beam in your own eye?” (BSB). Clearly, there are always going to be undesirable parts of our character needing to be exposed and corrected.

Instruction. Believers who are determined to follow the pathway of righteousness outlined by Christ must ultimately realize the final authority in determining what constitutes correct instruction rests on Scripture alone. Scripture being composed of the Torah (also known as “instruction,” “teaching,” or “law”), the Prophets, the Writings, and the New Testament. The Bible is the final authority in all matters related to Truth: Truth being the light illuminating one’s way toward proper conduct. As Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, for conviction, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (BSB). How much instruction is “enough”? Upon reflection, it appears to be that the only limits we will encounter in our quest to be instructed in righteousness are simply our desire to receive such instruction and our finite physical existence. Acknowledging once again my lack of experience with martial arts, until just recently, I mistakenly thought a “black belt” was the highest level an individual could obtain in karate or taekwondo. In actuality, higher level practitioners of these fighting skills may receive a tenth degree (or tenth level) black belt with continued advanced study and practice. The ultimate limit in mastery of these skills rests solely with the individual. Spiritual growth is similar in nature to the practice of martial arts, as the potential for advancement is controlled by an individual’s choices, and efforts, at its very foundation.

Moses records what is known as *The Shema* in Deuteronomy, chapter six, verses four and five. We read in Deuteronomy 6:4–9, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These words I am commanding you today are to be upon your hearts. And you shall teach them diligently to your children and speak of them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as reminders on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates” (BSB).

Notice we are told not just to listen, but to hear and





do these recorded words. We, as grafted in members of God's covenant, are to often speak of Scripture, to think of it when we are at home, to meditate on God's Word as we walk, as well as most other times of the day as we go about our daily activities. Our Messiah quotes from the eighth chapter of Deuteronomy in Matthew 4:4: "But Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (BSB). If we expect to obtain a "black belt" (so to speak) in our journey with God, we need to put the work in. Our Creator expects His followers to sincerely learn His ways and to walk in those ways earnestly. Our Father does not give everyone a "participation trophy" just for showing up! Recall the



expectation Jesus had of His followers as illustrated by the "Parable of the Talents" in Matthew 25:14–28. Not all individuals had the same abilities in this story, yet they were all expected to produce growth that aligned with their capability. The conclusion of the parable shows the servant who achieved the most was awarded even more responsibility and abundance—a continued process of ever-increasing growth. Spiritual growth, much like marital arts, does not have a fixed "upper limit" for those passionately aspiring to greater heights.

If we examine the type of "team" we may belong to, we can think of our "team" in a couple of different ways. Most obviously, our team physically consists of the assembly, or church family, we congregate with regularly. In a more philosophical way, we could consider many biblical writers and characters as members of our team, or more aptly put, our "coaches." In order to stay consistent with the martial arts theme, it may be more appropriate to refer to our "coaches" as our Senseis. It is quite fitting a Sensei is defined as a teacher or instructor, a person born before another, or one who comes before. Readers of this newspaper are most probably associated with the Church of God International (CGI) or other groups in the Sabbath-keeping

Church of God movement. Using CGI as an example, the "team" available to assist brethren earnestly seeking spiritual growth consists of many great teammates and coaches. There are many great pastors, deacons, and elders within CGI providing edifying Sabbath messages, Bible studies, podcasts, and programs each and every week. The internet easily allows truth-seekers to view biblically enriching material from groups all over North America and beyond. Regular church attendance, as well as earnest fellowship with like-minded brethren, are of great value in the quest for spiritual growth. In today's technological age, strong Christian bonds can be generated not only in person but online as well.

The Bible provides *ancient wisdom*, or "coaching," as recorded and preserved for us today by those who came before.

It goes without saying, Christ stands supreme as our King, Master, Coach, and Example. The epistles of the Apostle Paul, the letters of John and Peter, as well as writings by other authors included in the New Testament, provide invaluable inspiration and guidance for us today. Hebrews 4:12 exclaims: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it pierces even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (BSB).

Old Testament King David tells those of us seeking enlightenment in Psalm 19: 7–10:

"The Law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart; the commandments of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true, being altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb" (BSB).

David's most confident and loving advice for us today as recorded in Aleph, the first stanza of Psalm 119, is as follows:

"Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the Law of the LORD.

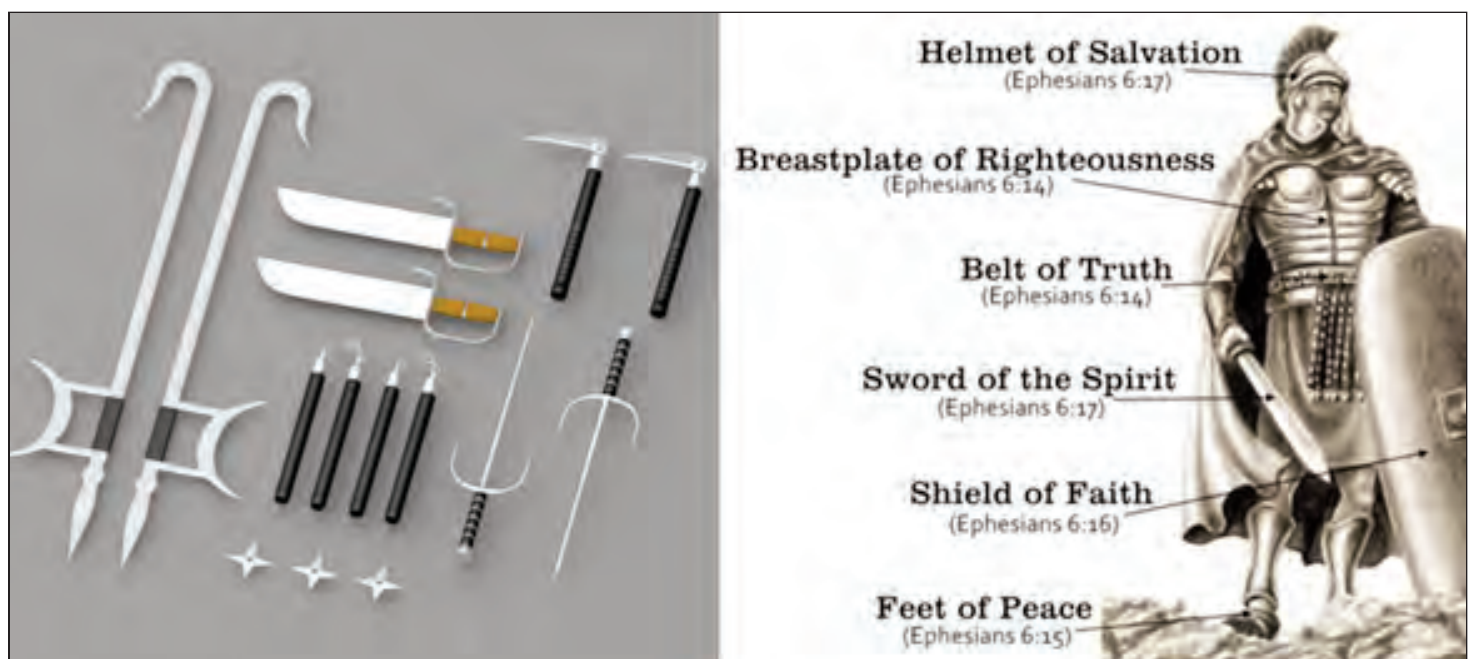
Blessed are those who keep His testimonies and seek Him with all their heart. They do no iniquity; they walk in His ways. You have ordained Your precepts, that we should keep them diligently. Oh, that my ways were committed to keeping Your statutes! Then I would not be ashamed when I consider all Your commandments. I will praise You with an upright heart when I learn Your righteous judgments. I will keep Your statutes; do not utterly forsake me" (Psalm 119:1–8, BSB). New Testament coaching by Paul encourages us, in Colossians 1:10, to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord," that we "may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work,

growing in the knowledge of God."

The foremost essential ingredients we must employ in order to obtain maximum spiritual growth are our very own *personal effort* and *commitment*. Change only occurs when an individual makes a conscious decision to do so. Access to the highest quality instruction in the world is useless if an individual refuses to learn from it, and then in turn *apply* it. The central character of the television show *Kung Fu*, a young man named Kwai Chang Caine (AKA "Grasshopper") spent many years being taught by masters of the ancient art in a Shaolin monastery. As a boy maturing into adulthood, he continually absorbed the knowledge he was taught, and he diligently practiced the skills he was expected to master. "Snatching the pebble" from his master's hand was a quintessential moment in the show that signified the student had reached a superior level of proficiency in Kung Fu training and achievement.

There are other interesting parallels that can be drawn between martial arts and our Christian walk. Let us consider for a moment why an individual may choose to study a martial art. In many instances, it is due to the fact that these arts have a strong reputation for success in teaching their adherents advantageous tactics of self-defense. Many martial art routines and techniques focus on specific moves to thwart an unexpected attack from an assailant. Don't we as Christians experience potentially similar situations, whereby the adversary and his demons wage an unsuspected attack on us? Just as a student of Kung Fu practices for vulnerable situations they may be exposed to in their physical environment, we should consistently guard our minds and thoughts against unseen influences and vexations. In order to improve skill level, it is necessary that a martial arts student compete against others. The higher one goes in the sport, the greater the competition to be confronted. In like fashion, as we continue our walk in the Faith, we should expect to face increased *competition* from the evil one. We must rely on our tools: instruction, teamwork, and our effort (or *will*) to combat these forces. It is always comforting to remember James 4:7: "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (BSB). At this point, it would be careless of me to forget to mention the wonderful Helper we may call upon in times of struggle: The Holy Spirit, our "Super-Sensei," if you will. I am reminded of Luke 12:12: "For at that time the Holy Spirit will teach you what you should say" (BSB).

Anyone who has started a new fitness regimen recalls how tired and sore their body felt the day after beginning exercise sessions. After establishing a regular pattern of training, however, the discomfort encountered from working out subsided substantially. Over a period of time, many individuals not only no longer dread having to go to their exercise routine, they actually begin to cherish it. For many indi-



viduals, physical activity becomes the highlight of their day! A similar positive feedback response mechanism may be generated in us, as we dedicate increased time and energy toward pursuit of our spiritual goal. First John 5:3 states, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome” (BSB). Christ tells us in Matthew 11:30, “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light” (BSB). We should be inspired to create healthy spiritual habits and actions, and in so doing, build up our spiritual “muscle memory.”

I have not mentioned any weapons used in tandem with the practice of Kung Fu or Karate, nor have I referenced any of the many specialized martial arts rooted in the use of weapons. Kendo is a Japanese based martial art focusing on the use of swords. Japanese Sojutsu employs the use of spears in fighting. Of course, there are many other specializations within the field of martial arts dedicated to the mastery of unusual weapons. Presumably, you already have in mind my reason for including this reference to weapons; and you may have guessed which book of the Bible I am alluding to—Ephesians. Yes, Ephesians, and more specifically the book’s sixth chapter description of the full armor of God. Putting on God’s armor is vitally important if we wish to ensure we are indeed able to muster a defense against Satan’s negative influences in our walk toward righteousness. “Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:10, BSB). Notably, Paul tells us the **Sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.**

In tribute to the television show *Kung Fu*’s prodigious use of flashback, let’s flashback in our minds to the scene I described earlier in which

“Grasshopper” finally snatches the pebble from his master’s hand. This scene is a celebrated moment in television history. In the future, however, there will be a much greater *scene* taking place: a *scene* revealing **One** taking an item from another **One**’s hand.

“Then I saw a scroll in the right hand of the One seated on the throne. It had writing on both sides and was sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?’ But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or look inside it. And I began to weep bitterly, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or look inside it. Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep! Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed to open the scroll and its seven seals.’ Then I saw a Lamb who appeared to have been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. The Lamb had seven horns and seven eyes, which represent the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And He came and took the scroll from the right hand of the One seated on the throne. When He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they were holding golden

bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song:

‘Worthy are You to take the scroll and open its seals, because You were slain, and by Your blood You purchased for God those from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign upon the earth’” (Revelation 5:1–10, BSB).

If we wish to be beneficiaries of this mighty event, one of the most spectacular moments in all eternity, we must diligently continue our training in the ways of righteousness.

Jeff Flanick attends the Church of God International, Medina, Ohio. Comments and feedback may be sent to jeffrey.flanick@gmail.com.



A Brief Review of *Thin Again (A Biblical Approach to Food, Eating, and Weight Management)* by Judy Eardell Halliday and Arthue W. Halliday

by Michelle Algarra



I read another groundbreaking Christian book about a Christian woman’s emotional journey. She was molested during her youth and it was a painfully traumatic experience. It led to overeating to assuage the emotional pain. Wrong eating habits caused her to become grievously overweight which further demeaned her self-image.

The path to emotional healing involved reevaluation of her personal concept as a child of God, a person created in God’s image and likeness. It was a difficult process of growth and overcoming, but she learned to reevaluate herself based on God’s standards rather than the faulty moral standards of this world.

Self-treatment or therapy involved learning to take care of her body through proper diet and exercise. By learning to eat healthy and exercising, she was able to lose weight and improve her body image and self-esteem.

She also learned the painful process of learning to forgive the man who had taken advantage of her and degraded her physical body and her spirit.

There are people who overeat not so much because of gluttony or lust for food as a sin. Some people overeat because it makes them feel good and somehow heals their depression and anxiety. Food sometimes has the same effect as tranquilizers and antidepressants. Because eating makes a person feel good, emotionally distraught people sometimes engage in it too much in order to assuage or alleviate the emotional pain.

Having a prayerful attitude and developing a deep

and abiding relationship with God the Father and the Lord Jesus can lead to cleansing of the mind and spirit and inner peace. By learning the art of forgiveness, a person can let go of painful experiences in the past and learn to accept and appreciate one’s self despite the damage other people may have caused.

All human beings, without any exceptions, have the inherent capacity to repent of sin and overcome. That means even immoral people, rapists, and

molesters have the opportunity to repent of their sins, receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, renew their character or change their ways, and also be granted eternal life.

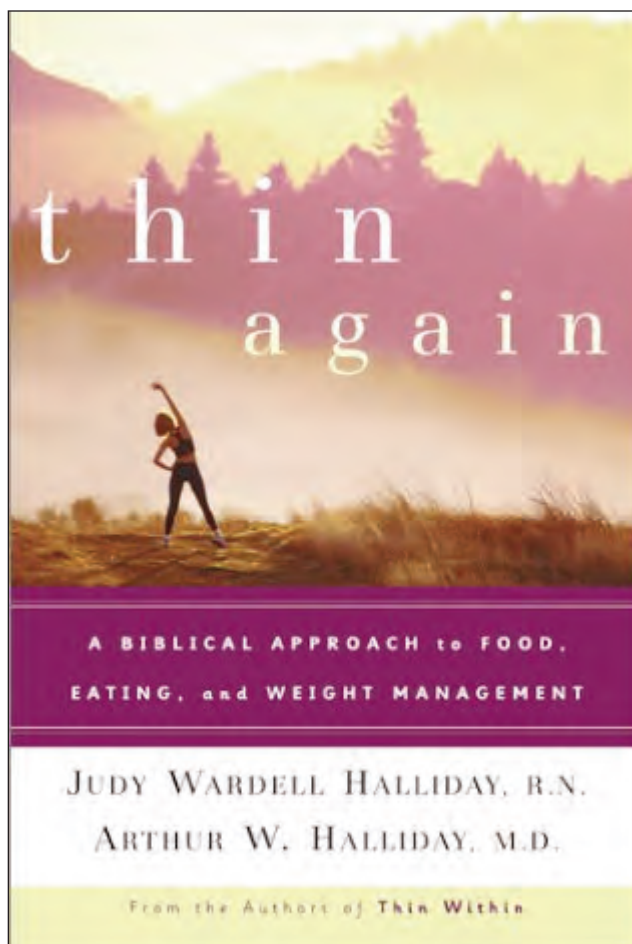
The problem, though, is that even when Christians learn to forgive others for the sins and offenses committed against them, there are repeated bouts of depression and anxiety that may last for decades due to memories lodged in their minds. The Christian, though desperately trying to learn the art of forgiveness, may keep on rehearsing those painful experiences in his or her thought processes and the long term consequences.

In the church, brethren must learn the art of compassion. Women and others who have gone through sexual abuse and other forms of maltreatment sometimes bear grudges and walk around with a chip on their shoulder.

Counseling and ongoing therapy, including taking care of one’s physical body in order to not only look good but also feel good, can enhance one’s self-esteem.

God is merciful, kind, and compassionate. And He does hear and answer prayers. He can even change the negative opinions of people regarding women and others who have suffered abuse and go through turmoil of obesity or weight problems. Not only can He change a person’s heart and spirit, He can teach a person that one’s value ultimately lies in being a human being with the ultimate potential of becoming a spirit being in God’s Kingdom.

God can provide a person going through cycles of depression and anxiety, and uncontrollable binge eating, with inner peace and joy through the presence of the Holy Spirit or the presence of Jesus in one’s heart.



What is an Abortion?

by W. Adam Boyd



Greetings friends! You may recall greater than a year ago, I wrote an article entitled, “When is a Baby Considered Alive?” We discussed and defined life from science’s definition and God’s definition (both of which define life beginning at conception).

Hopefully, we were all left with an understanding that unborn babies are indeed considered life and desperately need help fighting for their right to live.

Fast forward to May 2022 where we have a landmark decision by the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. There are many viewpoints on this subject, but, all this has done is return the decision to allow or prohibit abortion to be determined by each state (since the Constitution does not guarantee any *right* to abortion and never has—things not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution are supposed to be determined at the state level).

Many states have already sprung into action banning it outright, while others have said they will create new state laws to always allow it. Many elected officials, American companies, and others are even advertising that they will “pay for someone to travel and have an abortion” wherever they need to go—this is very peculiar as they do not routinely offer to pay for healthcare services or any associated travel before. Many of us have a difficult time even taking one day off work when we are sick (with some exception to the COVID era). What is this new movement that has people screaming in the streets? Is it about body autonomy? Is it about protecting a woman’s choice? How about the baby, does he/she get a choice?

Let’s look at some common reasons women say they need to have the option of abortion:

Rape

In the case of rape, most states that have or will ban abortion have an exemption for this. The incidence is extremely low, yet it has always been a go-to talking point when it comes to pro-abortionists. In 2004, The Guttmacher Institute surveyed 1,209 post-abortive women from around the country. Respondents gave reasons for why they chose to have an abortion. It found that less than 0.5 percent of abortions were performed due to rape. The highest percentage was due to “not being ready to have a child” followed by “can’t afford to have a baby.” Other reasons were given as well that you can check out [here](https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/tables/370305/3711005t3.pdf): <https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/tables/370305/3711005t3.pdf>. Sure this is only one study and was quite some time ago, but the incidence in which women get abortions due to rape remains extremely low to this day.

Medical Emergency

There is no such medical emergency that needs an abortion although its champions use these buzzwords often. It spreads confusion to say that a woman has to have an abortion due to some medical emergency—it’s just not true.

There are such scenarios in which a decision may have to be made to save either mom or baby in extremely rare circumstances, but this is not considered an abortion and is certainly not what women are going into outpatient clinics to discuss. Now, there is something called an ectopic pregnancy which is when the fertilized egg is stuck in the ovarian tube and is unfortunately not a viable pregnancy (and

there is no medical treatment that would make it viable), but it is not called an abortion to treat that problem.

What’s it all about then?

So what does the data says about why women get abortions? If we look further into the data, we find that 86 percent of all abortions are in unmarried women (CDC data 2019). What age group gets abortions? The largest portion of women who get abortions are aged 20–29 years old. Who gets abortions? Black women were found to be 3.6 times more likely to get an abortion than white women (CDC 2019).

So, most all abortions are performed due to a woman deciding she just does not want to have the baby, not because of rape or medical issues like the media exaggerates the importance of.

The decision to have an abortion is not a decision of reproduction, it seems more a decision of parenting or not. Women like the idea that they can choose whether or not they will raise a child (which is a great choice to have, and everyone should have that choice), but they fail to realize that they are not being accountable to what created the child in the first place—they having sex, which they certainly have all the control over. Sexual promiscuity and the current sex agenda fuels some women to want the option to abort because it allows them to have sex with whoever they want, anytime they want, and face no repercussions (except perhaps an STD). However, what’s not ever talked about is the fact that they certainly have the *choice* to use condoms or to utilize birth control if they are “not ready to have a baby” or “can’t afford a baby.” There is even a “morning after pill” available that prevents a pregnancy before fertilization occurs.

Of course, women also have the choice to abstain from having sex especially when not married as God has instructed us to refrain from (remember most abortions are in unmarried women). You see, these women have all the choice in the world to prevent a pregnancy in the first place! God gives us many examples in the Bible concerning sexual relations and marriage as well as illustrates the importance of marriage. One such example is 1 Corinthians 6:18–20: “Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.” Marriage is important. Another example is in 1 Corinthians 7:1–16.

What’s with all the hate?

Militant ladies are out there yelling at people because they are fired up about the recent Supreme Court decision. Unfortunately, there have been some unsavory characters targeting pregnancy centers and churches that help pregnant women with goods and services (yet they state Christians do nothing for the babies that live or the mothers that decided to have the babies). Their system feeds fear into young women who become scared and seek abortions. Some become violent against those who disagree with their viewpoint. They steer them away from places that could provide help and counseling because they say “getting an abortion is okay—it’s your right.” We see this concept of moral relativism playing out over and over in today’s world, and this ideology is no different. This is something we need to be aware of. God’s Word is clear in this matter. We are to “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean

not on your own understanding,” as Proverbs 3:5 tells us. First Corinthians 3:18–20 says, “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, ‘*He catches the wise in their own craftiness*’; and again, ‘*The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.*’” The people pushing the abortion agenda aren’t nearly as “wise” as they think. If we look at other cultures around the world objectively, we realize it is universally wrong to commit murder, and everyone agrees that everyone has the right to live. So why don’t babies have that right? Does the mother’s choice to abort trump their right to live?

So, let’s define what most of the women out there that are “pro-choice” REALLY think and know an abortion is: it is the ability to decide to murder your own child for any reason you deem necessary.

Most of the reasons are seemingly selfish and have nothing to do with health (isn’t it quite odd many abortionists usually identify with or prescribe to ideologies that are supposed to be “all about love”). As a matter of fact, the words *healthcare* and *abortion* do not even belong in the same sentence because there is nothing healthy about murdering a baby. The process is not healthy either. Many mothers who are post-abortion have psychological distress for years to come. Where is the love and sense of care? Where is the charity?

We must realize that there are more powerful things in play here. This confusion is designed. It is with purpose. It has destroyed so many lives all under the guise of “being someone’s right to choose” when nobody has that right (to murder at will). We know this, of course, to be deception from Satan. He is the master deceiver, and we can easily see the influence he has had on so many young people. He has deceived many into thinking abortion is okay—and this deception has even caused some people to boast and become proud of murdering their babies—and they will tell you those exact words and laugh about it! That’s absolutely disgusting! There’s no love found there, only hate.

There are so many talking points that could be discussed in regard to abortion—some of which need deep exploration. However, as believers, much of that doesn’t really matter because we draw from God’s Word on how to live our lives and how to conduct ourselves. He definitely doesn’t want us murdering babies. Remember God condemns sacrificing children to “Molech” or any pagan gods. Have some women made themselves “false gods,” elevating their own life worth and their own desires over and above their own baby’s life worth? Is today’s abortion a similar practice? Some would speculate it is.

In closing, let us remember that life is not an inconvenience, it is a gift! It would be hard for me to think any believer in God would not rejoice at the fact that so many lives will potentially have the chance to live now. It would also be very difficult for me to believe that someone that follows God and His Word would be okay with abortion.

The evil that is abortion will likely always exist in this life, unfortunately. It is a cancer in our society that badly needs a cure. Luckily, we know there is a cure, and His name is Jesus. Let us all pray for the unborn and for the struggling mothers out there, some of which who are deceived, confused, and searching for an answer. Finally, let us remember Matthew 7:7, which says, “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

En Route to the Kingdom

by George Roper



One of the pinnacles of accomplishment is found in successfully completing an undertaking after overcoming a number of challenges to do so. Such endeavors prove to be even more arduous when operating as a collective. The sensible view dictates that acting as a group towards a common goal is more effective than solely through an individual effort. In such a group makeup, leaders are instituted to assure organization and strategy in guiding the common interests of the concerted movement. It is understood that this body of members dedicated to a shared cause could potentially face external obstacles. However, the factor that can prove to be most detrimental to group success is the lack of internal cohesiveness.

The advancement of a unified cause involves more than overcoming opposition as an entity. Rather, assuring that the individual members of the body are able and of optimum resilience, so that they may coalesce, is what is most integral. In other words, how members are treated is what matters most to the longevity of any institution's aims. Often times these principles are disseminated and demonstrated by the leadership. Yet, in those instances where the leadership lacks this nuance of approach, harm can be incurred upon the members of an organization.

The ability to perceive and respond to the emotions and needs of others; while understanding and managing one's own emotions, is known as emotional intelligence. The benefit of this insight to the interpersonal relationships of an organization is enormous. In a survey conducted by Careerbuilders, a prominent online employment website, 71 percent of employers stated that they esteemed emotional intelligence above IQ. They recognized that those with high emotional intelligence exhibit greater self-control, are more empathetic to colleague's needs, and are more skilled in resolving conflict than those with one dimensional intelligence. This makes for a productive and pleasant work environment, with greater job satisfaction. When leaders employ this conduct, the personnel being led are able to flourish.

Another example of how influential the conduct of leaders is upon their respective members can be found in the Stanford Prison experiment. In 1971, Dr. Philip Zimbardo of Stanford University spearheaded a research team that conducted an experiment funded by the U.S. Office of Naval Research. The study, which took place on the campus grounds of the university, was originally scheduled to run for two weeks. It was to measure the effect of social perceptions upon behavior. A correctional prison environment was recreated as the setting for the study. Volunteers interested in participating in a prison study were solicited from a newspaper ad and given a stipend of \$15. The respondents cleared a mental health assessment and were later randomly assigned to categories of prisoner or guard. Efforts were made to have the role play be realistic and true to life. The guards were issued uniforms and sunglasses so that the inmates could not see their eyes. The faux correction officers were instructed not to abuse the detainees and not to allow the prisoners to escape. The inmates were taken into custody and brought to

the holding jail by the standing local police force. Over the course of the study, the guards' treatment of the inmates became brutal and inhumane. The inmates in turn became downtrodden. When an outside observer visited the experiment and expressed appall, Dr. Zimbardo moved to interrupt the study after only six days of operation.

The study infamously has come to be viewed as one of the most unethical experiments conducted. However, its findings have been used since to show how power and authority can be abused, with great harm inflicted upon subordinates. In addition, another criticism of the study alleges that the original advertisement for participants attracted those who were more inclined to display tyrannical behavior. In recognizing the harm that these demonstrations can produce in secular associations, we must make every effort not to incorporate them in the body of Christ.

As institutions of various fields can greatly benefit from benevolent leaders, so too can the church. Christ warned the disciples not to emulate the domineering leadership practices of the world.

But Jesus called the disciples and said, "You know that the rulers of the unbelievers lord it over them and their superiors act like tyrants over them. That's not the way it should be among you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That's the way it is with the Son of Man. He did not come to be served, but to serve



and to give his life as a ransom for many people" (Matthew 20:25–28, International Standard Version).

Christ's words were initiated by ambitious, promotion-seeking behavior by two of His disciples. They appeared poised to pursue some of the same debilitating leadership techniques that the world operates with, prompting Christ to redirect their motivations and presentation deliverance. Christ urged His followers to develop a high emotional intelligence that recognized the needs and concerns of those they would lead, further reinforcing the need to treat others with altruistic compassion.

As we work together as a church towards the Kingdom of God, it is important to be mindful of warnings that God has issued to his members. These warnings pertain to the reality that the church will indeed have to contend with individuals of influence within the church who have low emotional intelligence, who may disregard the welfare of those they are to nurture, and who corrupt the tenets of God's way of life. Paul acknowledged as much in his parting words to the leaders in Ephesus.

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be

shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:28–30, NIV).

In much the same way that weather advisories are issued to particular locales so that they may prepare for inclement weather, so too the church has been notified that it may be exposed to conduct that is not therapeutic nor enlightening but is rather destructive and diminishing. Christ did not walk back from that possibility but instead entertained its likelihood.

"A faithful, sensible servant is one to whom the master can give the responsibility of managing his other household servants and feeding them. If the master returns and finds that the servant has done a good job, there will be a reward. I tell you the truth, the master will put that servant in charge of all he owns. But what if the servant is evil and thinks, 'My master won't be back for a while,' and he begins beating the other servants, partying, and getting drunk? The master will return unannounced and unexpected, and he will cut the servant to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 24:45–51, New Living Translation).

Christ, through a parable, explains that leaders who practice nurturing conduct towards the church will be commended. However, those who deviate from extending moral and ethical care to members of the church will have a rude awakening when confronted with their negligence.

Throughout the church's history many have been reengaged to having a personal relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. As a result, they have found great value from their calling. Conversely, some have had experiences in the course of pursuing the faith where they felt let down by organized religion. From the first century until today, there have been unscrupulous individuals that associated themselves with the faith. As a result, well meaning people were hurt.

This is appalling. God does not delight in seeing pain in the world at large or in the church. Certainly, in an environment where circumstances such as these can unfold, it can be difficult to maintain one's faith. Our goal is to endure these conditions as we maintain a relationship with God (Matthew 13:24–30).

Christ emphasized this when He spoke of how challenging it will become to keep the faith for those in the church.

"At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Matthew 24:10–13, NIV).

Acknowledging that throughout the church's years, there have been individuals that did not have a positive experience in the church is not minimizing. Nor is it casting their experience away as collateral damage. It's recognizing that we in the body of Christ need to be cognizant of how we treat each other and stay attuned to each other's needs. All the while maintaining our relationship with God as we set our course enroute to the Kingdom.

Questions & Answers

by Vance A. Stinson

What about imprecatory prayers?

QUESTION: What are your thoughts on the imprecatory psalms? Should Christians pray for the destruction of their enemies the way the psalmist does in his prayers of imprecation?

ANSWER: Theories on the purpose and meaning of the imprecatory psalms, as well as questions surrounding whether and how Christians should apply them in their own prayer lives, have been debated by Christians for centuries, and different conclusions have been drawn.

I've been an advocate of "praying the Psalms" for many years. The Psalms reflect/reveal the good and perfect will of their divine Author *as well as* the strengths and weaknesses of their human authors. David, who composed many of the psalms, was both a bloody warrior (1 Chron. 22:8; 28:3) and a man of profound faith and commitment. We should expect, then, that the deeply introspective prayers composed by a man like King David would reflect his exceptional qualities as well as his shortcomings. And I believe that's exactly what we *do* find in the imprecatory psalms.

The Tanakh ("Old Testament") itself is the revelation of God—not merely a revelation (or collection of revelations) *from* God, but the revelation *of God Himself*. That is, this collection of books (including the Psalms) reveals what God Himself is like, *but only in part*. The fullness of the revelation of God came into the world at the Incarnation. Jesus Christ's life, death, resurrection, and ascension; His offices of King of Kings, High Priest, and Savior/Redeemer; and His teachings, as recorded in the New Testament, *fill up the meaning* of all previous revelation (Matthew 5:17ff). Indeed, *we can see God most fully by looking into the human face of Jesus!*

THEREFORE, when I read the Tanakh, *I read it through the lens of the Christ-event* (which includes all that is mentioned above). The question, then, is not whether or not the imprecatory psalms are instructive for Christian readers—I believe they are!—but is simply this: What does Jesus Christ say about how His followers should think of their enemies? And to this question, we have an unambiguous answer:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, *Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you*, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:43–48, ESV, emphasis mine).

This passage needs no explanation; its meaning is clear. The meaning of Psalm 109 is likewise unambiguous. The psalm, which is attributed to David, reads (in part) as follows:

- 9 May his children be fatherless
and his wife a widow!
10 May his children wander about and beg,

- seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit!
11 May the creditor seize all that he has;
may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil!
12 Let there be none to extend kindness to him,
nor any to pity his fatherless children!
13 May his posterity be cut off;
may his name be blotted out in the second generation!
14 May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD,
and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out!
15 Let them be before the LORD continually,
that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth! (ESV)

The psalmist is describing a corrupt court whose purpose is to destroy the accused. The New Testament account of Christ's betrayal, arrest, and trial echoes the situation the psalmist describes. The individual the psalmist refers to is either a corrupt judge or the chief accuser (prosecutor) of this bogus trial. The psalmist, in poetic fashion, is calling on God to reverse the roles and allow him to pronounce judgment on his false accusers; to let them—the chief accuser in particular—receive the punishment they seek for the accused.

The psalmist *honestly* expresses his feelings toward his accuser and the false witnesses the accuser has assembled. His enemies "encircle [him] with words of hate, and attack [him] without cause." They "reward [him] evil for good, and hatred for [his] love" (verses 3–4). If we put ourselves in the psalmist's place, we can easily sympathize with him; we can feel what he feels, and we realize he's just being honest with his own feelings. One of the lessons here is that we should always be open and honest with God, for we cannot hide our innermost thoughts and feelings from Him. However, *this should not be looked upon as a model for how we ought to pray regarding corrupt individuals and those who persecute us*. The psalmist was not praying *for* his enemy, except in the sense that he was praying for his enemy to *die!* He obviously did not have love of his enemy in his heart when he composed these words; nor was he thinking in terms of "hate the sin but not the sinner." No, he wanted the scoundrel DEAD and FORGOTTEN!

Should we, as disciples of the New David (Jesus Christ), pray that way? No, we should not! However, there is a sense in which we can and should pray for—and even work toward—the "destruction" of the ungodly. We do this, not by calling on God to reign fire from heaven upon them or causing them to meet the same fate Jezebel or the prophets of Baal met in the days of Elijah, but by calling on God to *change their hearts*, and by using us as His agents—instruments in His Almighty hands—in helping to bring about such change. This is what the Church's commission is all about!

I don't wish for the heads of the wicked to be dashed against the stones or for their bellies to burst open and pour their entrails onto the street for all to see. I want to see them "perish" by way of *repentance and remission of sins*. My hope—and prayer—is that the gospel will convict them; that the old sinful self will "die" and be replaced by the new man in Christ. *God destroys the wicked by turning the wicked into saints*—and He does it through human agents! This kind of "death of the wicked" happens all the time. It happens every day in the Muslim world and in communist countries where the saints suffer severe persecution. It happens in the abortion clinics. It happens in families and homes. It is by way of prayerful intervention and proclamation of the good-news message (the gospel) that our despised, falsely accused, persecuted brothers and sisters in China, North Korea, Nigeria, and many other parts of the world are, so to speak, agents of destruction—death angels!—whose prayers for their

persecutors storm heaven day and night.

The "destruction" we should pray for (and work to bring about) is the same kind of "destruction" the apostle Paul refers to in his first epistle to the Corinthian believers:

"When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man [who was in an incestuous relationship] to Satan for the *destruction of the flesh*, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 5:4–5, ESV, emphasis mine).

To "deliver to Satan" means simply to expel from fellowship. The purpose of this action is two-fold: 1) to prevent "a little leaven" from leavening "the whole lump" (verse 6), and 2) so that this man might come to repentance and overcome his sinful tendencies ("the destruction of the flesh"). Without the "destruction of the flesh" (repentance, overcoming), the man's "spirit" won't be "saved in the day of the Lord."

In addition, when we take our concerns before God, we, as followers of Christ, must recognize who the *real enemy* is. Paul says, "For we so not wrestle against flesh and blood [our human persecutors are but pawns; they're not the *real enemy*], but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12). *That's the real enemy!* And that's the enemy we should proactively oppose (see verses 13–20 for how to do it).

So, faithful Christian soldier, join the battle. Resist the enemy. Put on the whole armor of God. Pray, with supplication, that the soldiers of God's army might be victorious in their battle against the chief accuser and his minions.

Is cremation an acceptable option?

QUESTION: I would like to know what the Holy Scriptures say about cremation verses burial of the dead. Does it matter if we are cremated or buried? I know that God asked Ezekiel if the dried bones could live again, and that Scripture says that from the dust we were created and to the dust we will return.... Is it a sin or to be considered a curse to be cremated?

P.W. (sent by email)

ANSWER: Of first importance is the fact that there is no biblical commandment forbidding cremation. The biblical accounts generally presuppose burial, but that's most likely because burial of the dead was most commonly practiced among the peoples the biblical accounts deal with. Cremation was practiced by Near Eastern peoples during biblical times, so it seems likely that if God disapproved it He would have given a commandment forbidding His people from using it.

Second, a person's material remains, if left to nature, decompose and eventually return to the earth. Cremation merely speeds up the process; the end result is the same. The dead bodies of the patriarchs have decomposed and returned to the dust of the earth, but God will still raise them from the dead when the time comes. There were also righteous men who, because of their faith, were burned at the stake. They, too, will be raised at the resurrection of the just. God does not need a well-preserved corpse to raise an individual from the dead. If He did, He would not be able to raise Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but we know that He has promised to raise them and fulfill His promises to them.

With all this in mind, and knowing that a person's material remains return to the earth anyway, I cannot see how cremation could be a sin. Our ministry respects the choices individuals and families make regarding cremation or burial.

Male and Female He Created Them

The following is the introduction and first two chapters of our upcoming booklet, *Male and Female He Created Them*, which deals with issues surrounding the current debate on gender dysphoria and transsexualism. Watch for our announcement on the availability of the booklet.—*Editor*

by Mike James

Introduction

Before getting into the meat and potatoes of this booklet we need to define what we are discussing. In the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), gender dysphoria is defined as “incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender” in conjunction with “clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.”¹

The latest edition of the DSM has changed the name of the issue from “gender identity disorder” to “gender dysphoria.” The language has been changed to temper what is really being discussed here.

Despite what is being promulgated in schools, the media, and popular culture, many experts still believe this issue is a mental illness rather than a naturally occurring phenomenon. Dr. Paul McHugh explains, “This intensely felt sense of being transgendered constitutes a mental disorder in two respects. The first is that the idea of sex misalignment is simply mistaken—it does not correspond with physical reality. The second is that it can lead to grim psychological outcomes.”²

Dr. Allan Josephson, professor of psychiatry, observed in an expert declaration to a federal court that the shift in terminology and definitions related to discordant gender identity is a result of politics not science: “Changes in diagnostic nomenclature in this area were not initiated through the result of scientific information but rather the result of cultural changes fueling political interest groups within professional organizations.”³

Many health professionals look at gender dysphoria like other dysphorias, like anorexia nervosa. Just like some people believe they are overweight when they are not, the idea you are another sex when you are not is a similar phenomenon.

Another important point to address up front is the fact that sex reassignment surgery does not change a male into a female and vice-versa. “Transgendered men do not become women, nor do transgendered women become men” through hormones and surgery, Dr. McHugh emphasizes.⁴

Let us begin to understand this issue by first looking at the Bible.

Chapter 1— God Makes Mankind

In the beginning (**Genesis 1:27**) God created man “in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Throughout the Bible we see no other indication of another type of gender or any indication that God would allow us to change our gender.

In fact, throughout Scripture the distinction between males and females is addressed a number of times. Going back to Genesis 3:16 we see the differences between men and women when it comes to who can birth children and which of the two takes the lead role in marriage. It is important to note that with any team there is always a team captain, but that does not mean the captain is better than the other players in all facets of the game. The male merely

leads the team in marriage but does not control or demean the wife.

In 1 Corinthians 11:3, we see the admonition of the male leadership role reiterated again. In 1 Corinthians 14:34, we see another distinction between men and women. The mentioning of the law here may be in reference to God addressing the distinctions in marriage in Genesis. Ephesians 5:22–33 makes it clear the male takes the lead role in marriage, but as Christ takes the lead role in His association with the Church. This scripture must be read in context. Some use it to promote control of the husband in a marriage, but the husband has to love his wife as Christ loved the Church by dying for it. Other scriptures to consider on the male and female dynamic include 1 Timothy 2:11; 1 Peter 3:1; and Galatians 3:28.

There are not many scriptures that speak against changing your sex, but there is one we need to take a closer look at. It is found in Deuteronomy 22:5, which says the following: “A woman shall not wear a man’s apparel, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does such things is abhorrent to the LORD your God.” Some commentators on the Bible believe this scripture relates back to the division of the sexes God ordained when He created man and woman. Here are a number of commentaries on this verse found in *What is Truth—Opinion Based Upon the Bible*, “History and Deuteronomy 22:5 (part one),” July 6, 2009, <https://kentbrandenburg.blogspot.com/2009/07/history-and-deuteronomy-225-part-one.html>:

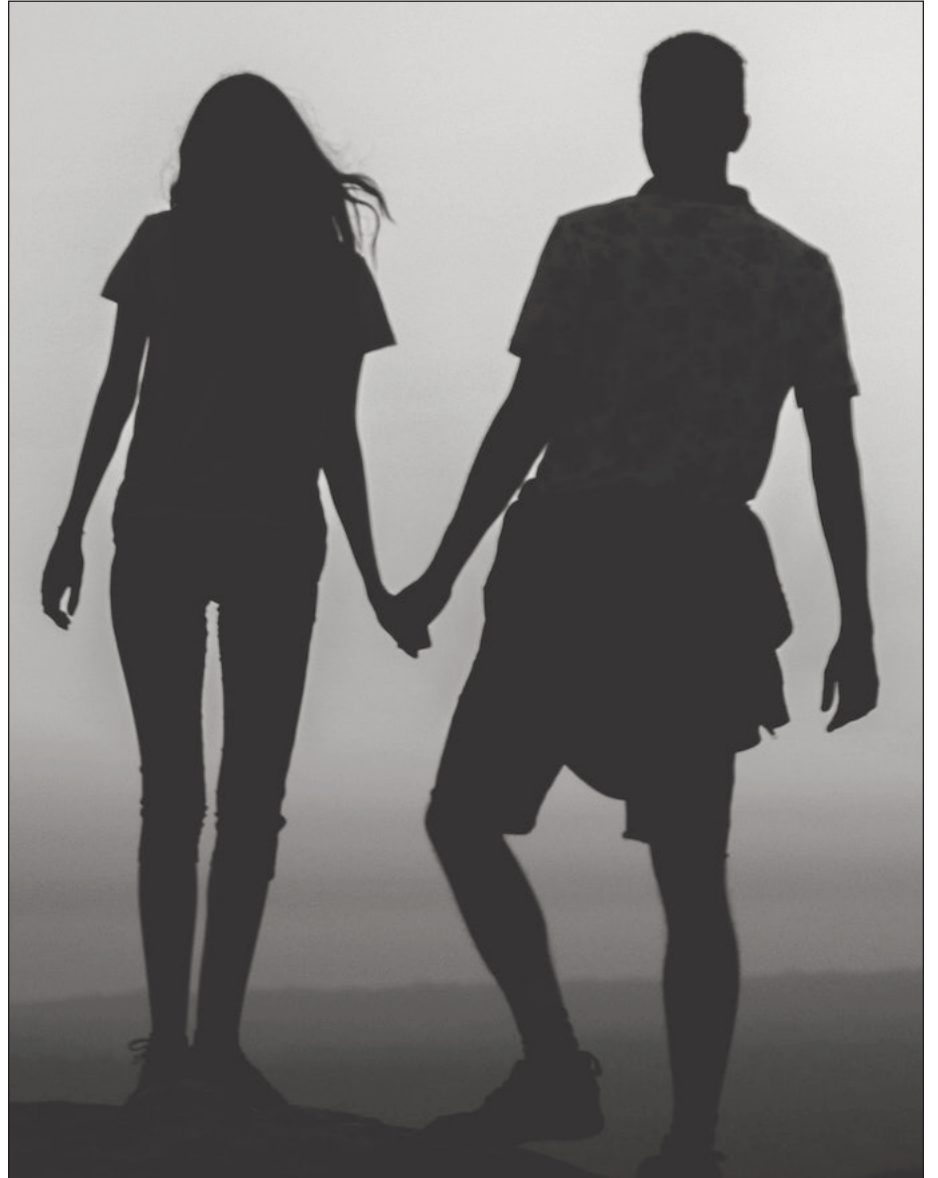
Barnes’ Notes were published in 1884–1885, and it states,

[D]istinctions between sexes is natural and divinely established, and cannot be neglected without indecorum and consequent danger to purity (cf. 1 Cor. 11:3–15).

Keil and Delitzsch, foremost Hebrew scholars, wrote:

As the property of a neighbor was to be sacred in the estimation of an Israelite, so also the divine distinction of the sexes, which was kept sacred in civil life by the clothes peculiar to each sex, was to be not less but even more sacredly observed. There shall not be man’s things upon a woman, and a man shall not put on a woman’s clothes.

Pulpit Commentary states,



[T]his is an ethical regulation in the interest of morality.... Whatever tends to obliterate the distinction between sexes tends to licentiousness, and that the one sex should assume the dress of the other has always been regarded as unnatural and indecent.

Lange’s Commentary reads,

The distinction between the sexes is natural and established by God in their creation, and any neglect or violation of that distinction, even in the externals, not only leads to impurity, but involve (sic) the infraction of the law of God.

Louis Entzminger wrote in 1936,

Notice v. 5 (Deuteronomy 22), forbidding women to wear male attire. This law was given to preserve the distinction of the sexes which was established at the creation of male and female.

Joseph Excell wrote in 1849, as recorded in *The Biblical Illustrator: Deuteronomy*:

God thought womanly attire of enough importance to have it discussed in the Bible. Just in proportion as the morals of a country or an age are depressed is that law defied. Show me the fashion-plates of any century from the time of the Deluge to this, and I will tell you the exact state of public morals. Ever and anon we have imported from France, or perhaps invented on this side of the sea, a style that proposes as far as possible to make women dress like men. The costumes of the countries are different, and in the same country may change, but there is a divinely ordered dissimilarity which must be forever observed.... In

Continued on next page

my text, as by a parable, it is made evident that Moses, the inspired writer, as vehemently as ourselves, reprehends the effeminate man and the masculine woman.

In a sermon entitled, “The Sinfulness of Strange Apparel,” Puritan preacher Vincent Alsop said in the mid 17th Century:

Nothing can justly pretend to be lawful ornament, which takes away the distinction which God has put between the two sexes.—That law, Deut xxii. 5, is of moral equity and perpetual obligation:... That which pertaineth, *keli*—The word signifies any “vessel, instrument, utensil, garment, or ornament,” military or civil, used for the discrimination of the sex: so Ainsworth (In *Pentateuchum*).... God therefore will have the distinction between the sexes inviolably observed in the outward apparel.... What particular form of apparel shall distinguish the one sex from the other, must be determined by the custom of particular countries; provided that those customs do not thwart some general law of God, the rule of decency, the ends of the apparel, or the directions of scripture.

Matthew Poole wrote in 1560,

Now this (a woman wearing a man’s garment) is forbidden, partly for decency’s sake, that men might not confound nor seem to confound those sexes which God hath distinguished, that all appearance of evil might be avoided, such change of garments carrying a manifest umbrage or sign of softness and effeminacy in a man, of arrogance and impudency in the woman, of lightness and petulancy in both, and partly to cut off all suspicions and occasions of evil, which this practice opens wide door unto.

Jewish scholar Samson Raphael Hirsch wrote in 1966:

It seems to us that it is clear that, according to this way of taking the prohibition, is not so much disguising one’s sex by dressing in female clothes as forbidding each sex that which is more specifically pertaining to the nature of the opposite one. A man is just as little to get himself up with powder and paint and lipstick, etc.; which is all quite in order for women to do, and is in accordance with feminine nature, as a woman is to appear in a profession which belongs to the nature of men.

The Jewish Publication Society Commentary: *Deuteronomy*, states,

“Put on a man’s apparel,” Literally, “a man’s *keli* may not be on a woman.” The translation “apparel” makes this clause synonymous with the second part of the verse; it is based on the fact that the plural of *keli* means “clothing” in rabbinic Hebrew.... The *halakhah* combines both views: women may not wear armor or clothing, hairdos, or other adornments that are characteristic of men, not may men wear what is characteristic of women (what is characteristic of each sex is defined by local practice).

Walter C. Kaiser, who has a tremendous handle of the Old Testament law, writes concerning Deuteronomy 22:5,

The maintenance of the sanctity of the sexes established by God in the created order is the foundation for this legislation, and not opposition to idolatrous practices of the heathen. The tendency to obliterate all sexual distinctions often leads to licentiousness and promotes unnaturalness opposed to God’s created order. Such a problem can arise in contemporary culture when unisex fashions are aimed at producing the bland person in a progressive desexualization of men and women. Thus, this provision aims mainly at one’s clothes as an indication of one’s sex.

Baptist Commentary says,

The text teaches that Israel was to maintain a clear-cut distinction between the sexes. It was, thus, necessary that clothing, as well as other things, which pertained to one, must not be utilized by the other.

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary says,

It is this fundamental principle which underlies the opening requirement of this section (i.e., of Deut. 22) that the distinction between man and woman should not be blurred by the one’s appropriating the characteristic articles of the other (Deut. 22:5).

Davis’ Dictionary of the Bible reads,

By the Mosaic law a man was forbidden to wear a garment that pertains to a woman, and a woman to wear that belonging to a man (Deut. Xxii.5; cp. 1 Cor. Xi. 6, 14).

J. Ridderbos in the *Bible Student’s Commentary: Deuteronomy*, states,

The wearing of clothes of the opposite sex is forbidden.

Fred H. Wright in *Manners and Customs of Bible Lands*, writes,

The law of Moses forbade a man to wear a woman’s clothing and a woman to wear a man’s clothing (Deuteronomy 22:5).

Merrill Unger says,

While the costume of men and women was very similar, there was an easily recognizable distinction between the male and female attire of the Israelites, and accordingly Mosaic law forbids men to wear women’s clothes, and vice versa (Deuteronomy 22:5).

Jack S. Deere on “Deuteronomy” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, writes,

The same Hebrew word translated “detests” (*toebah*, lit., “a detestable thing;” KJV, “an abomination”) is used to describe God’s view of homosexuality (Leviticus 18:22; 20:13).... Since this law was related to the divine order of Creation and since God detests anyone who does this, believers today ought to heed this command.

The Bible is clear gender dysphoria, transsexualism, and the like are not forms of expression God supports. To better help people experiencing these things we need to first look at various causes for this behavior.

Chapter 2— The Causes of Transgenderism

The experts tell us that 80–95 percent of children who say that they are transgender naturally come to accept their sex and to enjoy emotional health by their late teens.⁵ The statistics also tell us this problem is numerically very small. One report from 2016 says that somewhere around 0.6 percent of adults in the United States “identify as a gender that does not correspond to their biological sex.”⁶ Another says: “Gender discordance occurs in 0.001% of biological females and in 0.0033% of biological males.”⁷

There is no scientific

evidence that children are born transgender. The consensus of scientific data supports the idea that a baby boy and girl are what they appear to be at birth. The available evidence from brain imaging and genetics does not demonstrate that the development of gender identity as different from biological sex is innate.⁸

There are some interesting theories on what may lead adult males to become transgender. We need to understand that there are differences in why boys, girls, men, and women believe they are transgender.

Let’s first look specifically at why adult males may get into transgenderism.

Dr. Paul McHugh, commenting on his colleague’s (Dr. Jon Meyer) study at Johns Hopkins on men who had a sex change operation at Hopkins, reports the following: “Most of the cases fell into one of two quite different groups. One group consisted of conflicted and guilt-ridden homosexual men who saw a sex change as a way to resolve their conflicts over homosexuality by allowing them to behave sexually as females with men. The other group, mostly older men, consisted of heterosexual (and some bisexual) males who found intense sexual arousal in cross-dressing as females.”⁹

Studies at the Clarke Institute in Toronto arrived at a similar conclusion: that discordant gender identity in adult males could arise from homosexuality or from autogynephilia, a man’s sexual arousal in presenting himself as a woman.¹⁰

So what causes kids to become gender dysphoric in the first place? There is no one reason, but there are a number of possible reasons.

One popular theory is the brain-sex theory. This theorizes that the brains of gender dysphoric kids are like the brain type of their opposite sex. There is no solid evidence to support this theory.

According to research, a young child’s gender identity is both “plastic” and “elastic.” In other words it can change over time, and it responds to outside influence. So the fact our culture is providing messages of approval for children transitioning their sex can help lead these children to fully change.

Transgender activists suggest blocking puberty with hormones and other drugs gives kids more time to figure out what gender they really want to be. But this may lead children away from naturally confirming they are already the right sex.

The sex hormones and body development that occurs during puberty may help a child realize they should identify with the natural sex they were born with.

Obviously, **supporting a child** in their transition is one of the reasons children do transition. Dr.

2022 FALL FESTIVALS

*These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations
which you shall proclaim at their appointed times
(Leviticus 23:4).*

Feast of Trumpets: September 26

Day of Atonement: October 5

Feast of Tabernacles: October 10–16

Last Great Day (Eighth Day): October 17

Michelle Cretella argues that putting a child on a path of social transition and pubertal suppression is a “self-fulfilling” protocol, for it points to an “inevitable” and irreversible outcome.¹¹ Citing what science now knows about neuroplasticity, she notes that for a boy with gender dysphoria “the repeated behavior of impersonating a girl alters the structure and function of the boy’s brain in some way—potentially in a way that will make identity alignment with his biologic sex less likely.”¹² On top of this behavioral effect, the medical suppression of puberty “prevents further endogenous masculinization of his brain,” so that he remains “a gender non-conforming prepubertal boy disguised as a prepubertal girl.”¹³

Another reason for gender dysphoria may relate to **biological factors (genetic, prenatal sex hormones, temperament)**. These factors may be predisposing, but they are not determining. Let me explain.

One part of our biological makeup is temperament. Temperament can be defined as an individual’s character, disposition, and tendencies as revealed in his reactions. Boys, on average, are more physically active than girls. This is part of a boy’s temperament. Children with gender dysphoria might have reversed activity levels. The boys with gender confusion might have lower activity levels, and the girls might have higher activity levels. One expert thinks over time this could lead the children to identify more with the opposite sex.

Here’s how this might work for some children. A boy with a low activity level might find typical girl behavior more to his liking than typical boy stuff. This could lead him to play with the girls more often than the boys. This could have a “feedback effect on the child’s gender identity, especially during early development when cognitive reasoning is fairly rigid and black and white.”¹⁴

Children have a basic understanding of what a boy or girl is. They don’t have the ability to figure out that all boys are not into rough play and not all girls are into playing house. His thought process may look like this: “Because I don’t enjoy rough-housing, and because most of my friends are girls who also don’t enjoy rough-housing, and because I enjoy playing house, as do my friends who are girls, I must be a girl too.”¹⁵

Exposing a boy like this to other sensitive boys might help him remain connected to his male gender.

Like the boy in the above example, some kids see gender in black and white examples until they get beyond the age of seven.

Dr. Kenneth Zucker’s team found in their research that children with gender dysphoria have a delayed understanding of gender as opposed to other kids. This slowness or lag can predispose some of them to gender dysphoria.

Here is an example from a young boy who came to Dr. Zucker’s clinic. When asked why he wanted to be a girl, one 7-year-old boy said that it was because he did not like to sweat and only boys sweat. He also

commented that he wanted to be a girl because he liked to read, and girls read better than boys. An 8-year-old boy commented that “girls are treated better than boys by their parents” and that “the teacher only yells at the boys.” His view was that, if he was a girl, then his parents would be nicer to him and that he would get into less trouble at school. One 5-year-old boy talked about having a “girl’s brain” because he only liked Barbie dolls. In this boy’s treatment, he created drawings of his own brain, writing in examples of what made his brain more like a girl’s brain

Continued on next page

FEAST OF TABERNACLES 2022

Visit our website (cgi.org/fot) for updated information on this year’s Feast of Tabernacles.

Feast of Tabernacles 2022 Pinellas Park, Florida

October 10th – October 17th

YOU ARE INVITED to join us in the sunshine state in beautiful Pinellas Park, Florida, for the 2022 Feast of Tabernacles! We will have our daily worship services at 11:00 AM along with wonderful opportunities to fellowship before and after services, with many planned activities for all groups.

Location

Pinellas Park Performing Arts Center
4951 78th Avenue North
Pinellas Park, FL 33781

We will be offering Ignite for our teens ages 13–18. And have our newly enhanced Sparks children’s program: “Monumental,” for ages 2 to 12.

Go off-road for a *Monumental* adventure through the colorful canyons and sunbaked trails of the southwest. By exploring God’s awesomeness, your kids will form a rock-solid faith for the road ahead. Each day at *Monumental FEAST*, kids trek through field-tested rotations that reinforce relevant Bible points and immerse kids in new adventures.

All major motels offer discounts for AAA, AARP, Military, Good Sam Club, and many others; don’t forget to ask for the discount when reserving.

We are looking forward to seeing everyone having a blessed Feast!

FEAST OF TABERNACLES 2022 Poughkeepsie, New York!

It’s time to step up our planning for this year’s Feast of Tabernacles, and the brethren who will be keeping the Feast this year in New York invite you to join them at the Poughkeepsie site for eight wonderful days. Here is the information you’ll need for making your plans:

Holiday Inn (MEETING HALL ON SITE)
2170 South Road
Poughkeepsie, New York 12601
(845)462-4600

- **MAKE RESERVATIONS BY PHONE 24/7 under the name “Church of God International,” Code “CGI”**
- **\$109 Weekly Rate, \$209 Friday & Saturday Rate**
- **1 King Bed /or 2 Queen Beds, Sofa Bed, Microwave, Mini Fridge, (no kitchenette)**

Holiday Inn Website: www.ihg.com/holidayinn/hotels/us/en/poughkeepsie/pours/hoteldetail?cm_mmc=YextLocal_-HI_-US_-POURS

Residence Inn (OFF SITE)

2525 South Road
Poughkeepsie, New York 12601
(845)463-4343

- **MAKE RESERVATIONS BY PHONE 24/7 under the name “Church of God International,” Code “CHURCH OF GOD”**
- **\$139 Rate, Full Kitchen**
- **Studio King, with Sofa Bed**

Residence Inn Website: www.marriott.com/en-us/hotels/pouri-residence-inn-poughkeepsie/overview/?scid=45f93f1b-bd77-45c9-8dab-83b6a417f6fe&y_source=1_NjUwMzc0LTO4My1sb2NhdGlvi53ZWJzaXRl

Residence Inn Reservation Link: www.marriott.com/event-reservations/reservation-link.mi?id=1646357191685&key=GRP&app=resvlink

This year’s Feast will feature a three-hour dinner cruise that will sail by the Statue of Liberty and in view of the New York City skyline. Tickets are \$75 per person.

and what made his brain more like a boy's brain (e.g., when he developed an interest in Lego). Over time, the drawings of the size of his girl's brain shrunk and the size of his boy's brain expanded.¹⁶

All the examples above were children with pronounced gender dysphoria. They were counseled to deal with their feelings rather than what happens at other clinics where children are counseled to take drugs to become the opposite sex.

Another biological reason finds some support in Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) studies. Some people suffering gender dysphoria might have neural structures that more closely resemble the structure of their desired sex than their born sex.

But does this mean they are the wrong sex? The answer is an emphatic *No!* According to Dr. Zucker, "It's completely simplistic to say that there are 'male brains' or 'female brains'...[with] most traits, both physical and behavioral, there's a lot of overlap between boys and girls, or men and women."¹⁷

Yet another reason for dysphoria is due to the occurrence of **other mental disorders** with the child. The other mental problems can predispose the child toward gender dysphoria. In evaluating two hundred peer review studies on sexuality and gender identity in 2016, Lawrence Mayer and Paul McHugh concluded that people who identify as transgender have an elevated risk for various mental health problems.¹⁸ A study done in 2014 found that 41 percent of people who identify as transgender will attempt suicide at some point in their lives, compared with 4.6 percent of the general population.¹⁹

A team of researchers from the United Kingdom (UK), in a literature review published in 2016, also saw a considerably higher rate of autism spectrum disorder among children and adolescents with symptoms of gender dysphoria than in the general population.²⁰

Here is how autism might predispose some kids toward gender dysphoria. Many kids with gender dysphoria show intense interest in opposite gender activities. Having autism could intensify that interest. Both gender dysphoria and autism spectrum disorder are marked by obsessive or focused interest and rigid thinking. There is also anxiety in both disorders if there is interference with their obsessive behavior. Gender can be a focus of obsessional thinking, and this obsession might be essentially a "magnification" of interests that a typical child could have at a similar stage of development.²¹

One young boy named David with autism and gender dysphoria reflected on the reasons for wanting to be a girl as he developed. David talked about being bullied by peers for his gender atypical interest. David thought that, in many ways, his interest to become a girl may have been a way to avoid the bullying from peers. David also reiterated the very reinforcing aspects of many of his female-type interests. Finally, he reflected on his negative feelings about himself and his behavior, and his therapists considered his gender dysphoria as an effort to cope with his feelings.²²

Family issues, trauma, and abuse are other causes of some gender dysphoria. Here are a couple

examples of how these can lead to gender dysphoria. In one example a boy named Tom came to Dr. Zucker at age 4. He had wanted to be a girl for a year before his visit to Zucker. Zucker found out the boy started his new behavior after his baby sister was born. His mom was characterized as narcissistic and his dad was often absent working 18-hour days, seven days a week. Tom's mom had a volatile personality. She was intense and anxious. She looked at Tom as perfect until he started wanting to be a girl. This caused issues for the mom. She then experienced Tom as less than perfect, which, for her, was a severe narcissistic injury.²³

Zucker believed Tom felt abandoned by his mom, who was now more invested in the daughter. Tom was focusing on being a female due to the abandonment issue and jealousy toward his sister.

Abuse can also play a part in influencing kids toward gender dysphoria. A girl named Rose who was dealing with the issue found her mom dead. The mother had been murdered by her boyfriend when Rose was 4. Rose was adopted at age 6. During her assessment, Rose commented that she wanted to be a boy because boys were stronger than girls.²⁴ She would tell her adoptive mom when they walked down a street that no one would hurt her (adoptive mom) because Rose looked like a boy. Rose acknowledged that she has had the recurring thought that, had she been a boy, then she would have been able to protect her mother from the boyfriend because "boys are stronger than girls."²⁵

Another male child treated by Dr. Kenneth Zucker wanted to be a girl to better connect with his single mother. The boy had previously been abandoned by his mom. This boy reasoned that if he was a girl his mom may not leave him again.

More recently there has been an uptick in teenage girls claiming to be gender dysphoric. Dr. J. Michael Bailey believes for many teenage girl's gender dysphoria is a hysteria like multiple personality disorder, another historical example of disturbed young women convincing themselves they possess an ailment and then manifesting the symptoms.²⁶

NOTES

¹ American Psychiatric Association, "Gender Dysphoria," *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed. (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 452 in Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, (New York: Encounter Books, 2018), p. 95.

² Paul McHugh, "Transgender Surgery Isn't the Solution," *Wall Street Journal*, May 13, 2016 in Anderson p. 95.

³ Declaration of Allan M. Josephson, M. D., U.S. District Court, Middle District of North Carolina, Case I:16-cv-00425-TDS-JEP, Exhibit J in Anderson, p. 95.

⁴ Anderson, p. 101.

⁵ Anderson, p. 123.

⁶ Lawrence S. Mayer, M.B., M.S., Ph.D., and Paul R. McHugh, M.D., "Sexuality and Gender Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences," *Special Report*, *New Atlantis* 50 (Fall 2016): p. 8.

⁷ Declaration of Quentin L. Van Meter, M.D., U.S. District Court, Middle District of North Carolina, Case

I:16-cv-00425-TDS-JEP, Exhibit I.

⁸ Mayer and McHugh, "Sexuality and Gender Findings," p. 105.

⁹ Paul McHugh, "Surgical Sex," *First Things*, November 2004, in Anderson, p. 109.

¹⁰ Anderson, p. 109.

¹¹ Anderson, p. 125.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Kenneth Zucker, Hayley Wood, Devita Singh, and Susan J. Bradley, "A Developmental Biopsychosocial Model for the Treatment of Children with Gender Identity Disorder," *Journal of Homosexuality* 59 (March 2012): 376 in Anderson, p. 135.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Zucker et al., p. 378 in Anderson p. 136.

¹⁷ Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage*, (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2020), p. 125.

¹⁸ Mayer and McHugh, "Sexuality and Gender Findings from the Biological, Psychological, and Social Sciences," p. 8.

¹⁹ Anne P. Haas, Philip L. Rodgers, and Jody Herman, "Suicide Attempts Among Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Adults: Findings of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey," *Williams Institute*, UCLA School of Law, January 2014, <http://williams-institute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/AFSP-Williams-Suicide-Report-Final.pdf> in Anderson, p. 93.

²⁰ Derek Glidden et al., "Gender Sysphoria and Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Systemtematic Review of the Literature," *Sexual Medicine Review* 4 (January 2016): 9, in Anderson, p. 137.

²¹ Zucker et al., p. 379 in Anderson p. 138.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 380 in Anderson p. 138.

²³ Anderson, p. 138.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²⁵ Anderson, p. 139.

²⁶ Clifford N. Lazarus, "Why DID or MPD Is a Bogus Diagnosis," *Psychology Today*, December 29, 2011, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/think-well/20112/why-did-or-mpd-is-bogus-diagnosis> in Shrier, p. 134.

Visit us on the Web!

- Visit our newly updated website!
- Subscribe to *The International News* and other periodicals.
- Listen to or view past editions of the *Armor of God* program!
- View our CGI webcasts and our archives.
- Read our CGI blogs.
- Keep up to date with our youth services and activities.
- Download lessons of our *Home Bible Study Course*, or send for a hard copy.
- Download iTunes hymns from our hymnal.
- Read the Bible online in over 25 versions and in many languages, including the Hebrew and Greek.
- See and hear our online *Web Chats*.
- See/hear thousands of archived sermons, booklets, and articles.
- Peruse our online literature library!
- Make prayer requests!
- Find local church congregations using unique scalable maps.

WATCH FOR MORE TO COME!

Open Church Policy

The Church of God International is an open church.

We have many people attending who are new in the faith. Some will not always keep each of God's laws as they should, and some will not believe everything we teach. We pray that they may be strengthened through the services we render and the examples we set as they come to a closer walk with their God. We request that you be neither judgmental nor base your standard for obedience on what you see your brother do. Christ is our standard, not weak and sinful men. Always remember that you will be judged for what you do, not what others do. Your job is to pray for them, set the right example, and please the Father in all that you do.

In Loving Memory

Kenneth Bounds

September 14, 1952 – August 12, 2022



Kenneth Wayne Bounds was born on September 14, 1952 in Glendale, Arizona. He passed away on August 12, 2022 in Plain Dealing, Louisiana. He was 69 years old.

He was preceded in death by his parents, W.C. and Alice Bounds, and his brother, Kevin Eugene Bounds.

He is survived by Vera, his wife of 13 years; children, Kenneth Wayne Bounds, Jr. of Plain Dealing, La.; Tony Shelton Bounds (Kim) of Benton, La.; and Alicia Bounds Richardson (Joseph) of Perry, Ga.; brothers, Gerald David Bounds (Sheri) of Porter, TX and Michael Dennis Bounds (Rebecca) of Cypress, TX; uncle, Robert Bounds; 8 grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Ken graduated from Plain Dealing High School in 1971, attended Louisiana Tech University and later received a

Computer Maintenance and Services degree from Draughton Business College in 1989. Ken spent the majority of his career as an electrical engineer. His last working years were spent at Can-Am Chains in Shreveport.

As a child Ken loved playing baseball and played on the All-Stars at Barksdale. He also had a wonderful voice and loved singing. Later in life he often used this talent as worship leader at church and to provide special music for services. Known for his generous spirit, he was always helping out those in need. He will be truly missed by his family, as well as his extended church family.

Ken was a member of the Church of God International of Tyler, Texas, and attended services with the Shreveport-Bossier congregation.

The Great Commission

WHY BAPTIZE?

by Robert Onsando

Baptism is one of the elementary doctrines which serves as an entry criteria into a religious organizational membership. It symbolizes a union with Christ, by recognition of the sinful nature and ready willingness to renounce the old sinful past by taking a cover of Jesus Christ. Similar to the insurance coverage people take, Jesus is the cover who, in this case, will blot out all the repentant sinner's transgressions, washing them away, and imparting newness of life through the Holy Spirit.

By baptism we therefore confess our trust and faith in the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This marks the beginning of a "new creation in Christ"—a spiritual regeneration and new beginning—while testifying in public of the death of sin.

We do believe in the ordinance of water baptism by immersion after self-actualization, leading to repentance. The word "baptism" is borrowed from Greek *baptizo* meaning "immersion." John introduces water baptism as a sign of repentance leading to eventual remission of sins.

"In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" Now John

wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins" (Mathew 3:1-6).

John the Baptist chose a particular river for the simple reason that there was enough water for the job. John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized (John 3:23).

Following Jesus' Example

Jesus was baptized by John regardless of being sinless, to show an example to His disciples and generations to come.

"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented. And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (Mathew 3:13-17).



21 Baptized in Igwera and Giribe



At the Church of God, Igwera, on April 13, eight souls made a decision to bury the old and rise anew with Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. It was a joy witnessing this confession. There was joy in heaven, and we now continue teaching them as Jesus commanded.



On June 12, thirteen more souls at the Church of God, Giribe surrendered their lives to God and were baptized into Christ Jesus. We continue with the task of teaching these new disciples as Christ has instructed us to do.

Four baptized in Sheridan, Wyoming



On May 21, 2022, four people were baptized in Sheridan, Wyoming. About 30 people were on hand for the event. The baptisms were conducted in a water-trough at the home of Rick and Kathy Woods. The primary members of this group in Wyoming reside in Sheridan and Gillette, Wyoming. The baptized include (left to right, front row): Tom Carr, Rachel Bishop, Donna Davis, and (back row, right) Jerry Rocovits.



IN THIS ISSUE

“Were the Ten Commandments in Force Before Moses?” by Mike James, page 1

“What Is Mankind’s Option for Survival?” by Bill Watson, page 2

“Kung Fu Fighting” by Jeff Flanick, page 5

“A Brief Review of Thin Again” by Michelle Algarra, page 7

“What is an Abortion?” by W. Adam Boyd, page 8

“En Route to the Kingdom” by George Roper, page 9

“Questions & Answers” by Vance A. Stinson, page 10

“Male and Female He Created Them” by Mike James, page 11

And Much More!

www.cgi.org



THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

3900 TIMMS ST., TYLER, TEXAS 75701

Published by The Church of God International

www.cgi.org

NON-PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Texas 75701
Permit No. 254

Fall Issue

Check us out on the Web: www.cgi.org