

THE EDIFIER

Church of God (Seventh Day) Australia

February 2024



**The Law of God
The Righteousness of God
Be Still and Know God
Under Open Skies**

A magazine dedicated to uplifting
and transforming peoples' lives
through the uncompromised Word of God

THE EDIFIER



The truth will make you free

- 3 The Law of God
- 4 Attain the Righteousness of God
- 6 Australian General Conference
- 7 Nothing Greater
- 8 Be Still, And Know God
- 11 Deny Yourself
- 11 Letting Go
- 12 Under Open Skies
- 14 The Evil of Gossip
- 15 Too Late to Change?

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Photo taken in Port Harcourt, Rivers State in Nigeria, November 2023. Delegates gathered from across the world to effect the business of the church, resulting in the historic formation of the Church of God (Seventh Day) International Federation.

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From the Editor

The Church of God (Seventh Day) from 44 countries from around the world, convened in

November last year, in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, to effect the business of the church.

As a result, the International Ministerial Congress is now superseded by the Church of God (Seventh Day) International Federation, and this consensus is a powerful testimony to God's good work among us.

How good it is when brethren work together in harmony, and witness the counsel of the Holy Spirit prevail. In 1978, Australia was one of the charter members of the International Ministerial Congress, whose purpose then was to provide opportunity for fellowship among our church leaders throughout the world as well as progressively work for doctrinal unity.

Since then, our church has grown, as have our needs. One of the principle goals of the International Federation is pastoral training and equipping. This is non-negotiable. We know we need well-trained, humble, Christ centred and Spirit led men, who can elucidate the gospel of Jesus Christ according to the gifts given to them. Are you a man who has a heart for God and his people?

Here in Australia, we're grateful to see the needs of pastoral care being fulfilled according to God's timing and purpose. We have enormous work to do, prepared beforehand by our loving God so our participation may reflect His glory.

Like Isaiah, we stand before the throne of grace, and respond to our Lord's call with, "Here I am. Send me."

Thus, we meditate on Jesus' teaching, and what it means to each of us personally (as paraphrased): "Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and the things of food, clothing and shelter will be provided for."

We hope you enjoy this latest edition of The Edifier magazine. Many thanks to our regular and new contributors. We each have a testimony, and to share this hope in joyous Spirit-filled words that reflects our Saviour's heart also replenishes our hearts with joy. □



The Law of God

A willing or a hardened heart?

Paul asserted that God's law is perfect, holy, just, and based on love. Jesus said of this kind of love, "If you love me, keep my commandments."

In discipling those in Corinth, Paul's appeal to them, among other things, was for their generous participation towards the needs of ministry. Notably he did not mention tithing. Yet, we cannot deny the spirit and intent of generosity even as tithing historically was mandated.

The universe, of course, is governed by law. The law of gravity, for example, governs life as we know it. Law is central to civilised, sustained life. Even the "gentiles", as Paul asserted, recognised the need for law.

Spiritually speaking, Paul illustrated the perfection of God's law, and how its obedience is commanded in then bringing us to Christ. But equally, Paul noted the limitations of the law, in that the law of itself cannot save us. What the law actually does is condemn us because by the law Paul learned what sin is – and we have all sinned!

In writing to those in Rome, Paul asserted: *What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet."* (Romans 7:7)

Paul helps us today understand the veracity of what the law is, who the Lawgiver is, and what the law does.

The idea of the law's integrity can also be rephrased by asking the question, "What is sin?" What or who defines sin, and by what means? Paul knew that coveting was sin, and he knew it by the law of God – specifically the Ten Commandments – as thundered from Sinai, and written on tablets of stone by the very finger of God, personified in Jesus Christ, and further commended to our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

The hardened and stubborn heart, of course, resists God, resists His Word and rebels against His laws. Yet the ancients, as far back as Abraham, we learn from scripture, kept God's law, commandments, judgments and statutes!

The Ten Commandments, of course, occupy a higher place than do all the other Biblical laws, statutes and judgments, as those ten were specifically kept in the Ark of the Covenant under the Mercy Seat (depicting God's heavenly throne.) Notably, the other 613 laws existed outside of that.

It's a healthy conversation to have as we wrestle with the prescriptive and descriptive facets of life under the old covenant, and what this new life in Christ looks like for us under the terms of the new covenant.

Do we believe in tithing, for example, as patterned in Scripture, and as expressed in Jesus' words of "render to the government what is theirs and to God what is His"?

More than just the bare minimum, however, the intent of God's law is spiritual, holy and perfect, and best manifested and lived with a generous, willing and obedient heart. □

*John Klassek
Spencers Brook, Western Australia*

How do we Attain the Righteousness of God?

Jesus gave this instruction to his followers on the mountain, not to be anxious and worried about the physical necessities of life, but to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and know that God will take care of the things that are so needful to us as human beings.

How do we go about seeking God's righteousness? We have to know what it is before we can seek it.

Starting out in life as children, how do we know what is right? We have to be taught and instructed in the right ways of thinking, behaving and doing. We should naturally learn this from our parents and guardians. Where should they have learned it? The infallible source is the inspired writings of Holy Scripture as explicit in the Law, the Prophets and the Writings of the Old Testament and the New Testament writings that explain these, and are based on them.

Most parents fall short, to a greater or lesser extent because they themselves do not have the knowledge and understanding to pass on. The Jews in the ancient nation of Judah attended the synagogues every Sabbath and heard the Scriptures read, which was being read through every three or four years. They heard, but failed to understand.

Clearly stated in these Writings is that "all that God instructs us to do is righteousness" ("all God's commandments are righteousness" – the Hebrew means instructs). The law of God is truth, and all the instruction from Torah. The "Ten Commandments", called the Ten Words or Statements of God, define what is righteous, and expose what is not. "Keep these, and follow the law of God, and you will live".

That is what the Torah states. "The man who does those things shall live by them". Jesus Himself, in His answer to the rich young man's question, said, "If you will enter into life keep the commandments" (the instruction from Torah).

So, for the Jews, attending synagogue every Sabbath, this was the path to being righteous – doing all the words of the law that they heard every week. The problem is that this same Law that teaches people how to live and think has this certainty written in it – "cursed is everyone who confirms not all the words of this law by doing it". The inspired Scripture is "God breathed", it is His Word and cannot be broken. We

can think we are keeping this instruction, but if we fail in just one point, in effect we break the lot, and fall under this curse. We fall short of what is written and the righteous standard that would give life.

This is what the Jews in Jesus' day, understood as the way to being righteous "doing all the words of this law". Later described by the apostle Paul as "serving in the letter" and seeking to be justified by everything

that is written. Some things in Torah were within their grasp of comprehension, and others were not, due to the human nature that naturally resists the ways of God. These were the things that Jesus described as "weighty matters of the Law". The majority were blind and deaf to the spiritual truth contained in the Writings they heard every week. Their focus was on the physical rules and regulations, which all had valid and various purposes, but they were blind to the underlying purpose of the teachings. The rich young man who told Jesus he'd kept the commands from his youth was not aware that he was putting his wealth where God should have been.

**Scripture is
God breathed;
it is His Word
and cannot
be broken.**

Saul the Pharisee, was not much different to this. When he (now known as Paul) was illuminated, he could see the reality that this Torah, ordained to life, he found to bring death, because of his human nature and habits of thought and deed. It was good, but it condemned him. It had the effect of inescapably placing him under the curse that would ultimately result in his eternal death.

Jesus, teaching on the mountain said He had not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to fulfill them. He was born under the law, inasmuch He was born a Jew, under the Sinai covenant, and was obliged to keep all the instructions given under that covenant, which He did to perfection. He taught that unless one's righteousness exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees, who thought they had all the rules and laws "under their belts", they would not be in the kingdom. He went on to say that whoever "broke one of the least of these commands" would be called least in the kingdom (called least, not necessarily in it!) There is a problem with how this is translated, and I have confirmed with a native Greek speaker that what He said should be translated "whoever breaks one of these precepts the least" or "in the least way" (the Pharisees were very diligent about keeping the lesser, highly observable laws, such as fringes or tassels on edges of garments etc.) Jesus then went on to elaborate that harbouring anger towards someone is breaking the sixth Word (commandment) and looking with lust on a woman the seventh.

The law was being broken in the heart or spirit of the person, as the law in its entirety is spiritual. The law is spiritual, and it is just not fully comprehended by the natural mind. Expressions such as "the spirit of the law" and the "letter of the law" are not found in the Bible, and can lead to erroneous thinking. The Biblical expressions used are "serving in the letter" and "serving in the spirit".

As the law is spiritual, that is the Ten Words spoken by God, and the instruction that flows from that, we need a spiritual mind to understand and keep it. We have to acknowledge the truth of it. If truly honest we find ourselves falling short. This is where the love and mercy of our God of judgment, mercy and faith comes to our rescue. What the law could not do, He

did, by sending His son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and allowing Him to become a curse for us, so that the righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not "walk after the flesh" (following our human natures) but "after the Spirit". That is, "serving in the Spirit".

We then have to live our lives believing and trusting in this justifying sacrifice as a means to attain the righteousness God requires. We have to believe with our minds and hearts, and acknowledge with our mouths before God that He is just and we are in need of this sacrifice to be justified. The only way to be righteous is through the mercy and grace of God. No amount of rule keeping and careful law keeping will achieve it – not because the laws are inadequate and bad, but because our very natures are flawed and opposed to these truths. We need mercy and help to make it possible for us to live in harmony with these very laws that condemn us in our natural state. We have to become a new creation.

**The law is
spiritual, and
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not fully
comprehended
by the
natural mind.**

This is what Paul wrote of about his fellow countrymen:

For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end (the goal or aim) of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. (Romans 10:2-3)

Having accepted this free gift we are to then "serve in the spirit", that is live our lives in the faith of Jesus Christ, our saviour, relying on God's mercy, and increasingly comprehending, obeying and living by what is written in the inspired Scripture. We have to allow Him and His Father to dwell, abide or live in us, through their Spirit. We are to live the life of love that God desires and paid dearly to share with us in order to make us into the people He want us to be. □

**Michael Evans,
Tapitalli, NSW**

Scriptural references - Matthew 6:33; Proverbs 1:8; Psalm 119:142 and 172; Leviticus 18:5; Deuteronomy 6:25; 27:26; 21:23; 2 Timothy 3:16; James 2:10; Romans 1:9; Romans ch7 and ch8; Romans 10:9-10; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Matthew 23:23-25; 13:15; Acts 13:39; 28:27; Galatians 3:10-13; 4:4; John 10:35

Living today, yet awaiting "That Day"!

TODAY, & THAT DAY!



TODAY, & THAT DAY!

You are invited to the Australian General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day) on 20-23 March 2024. An exciting schedule of events is being planned. Venue is at 1470 Stoneville Road, Mundaring, Western Australia

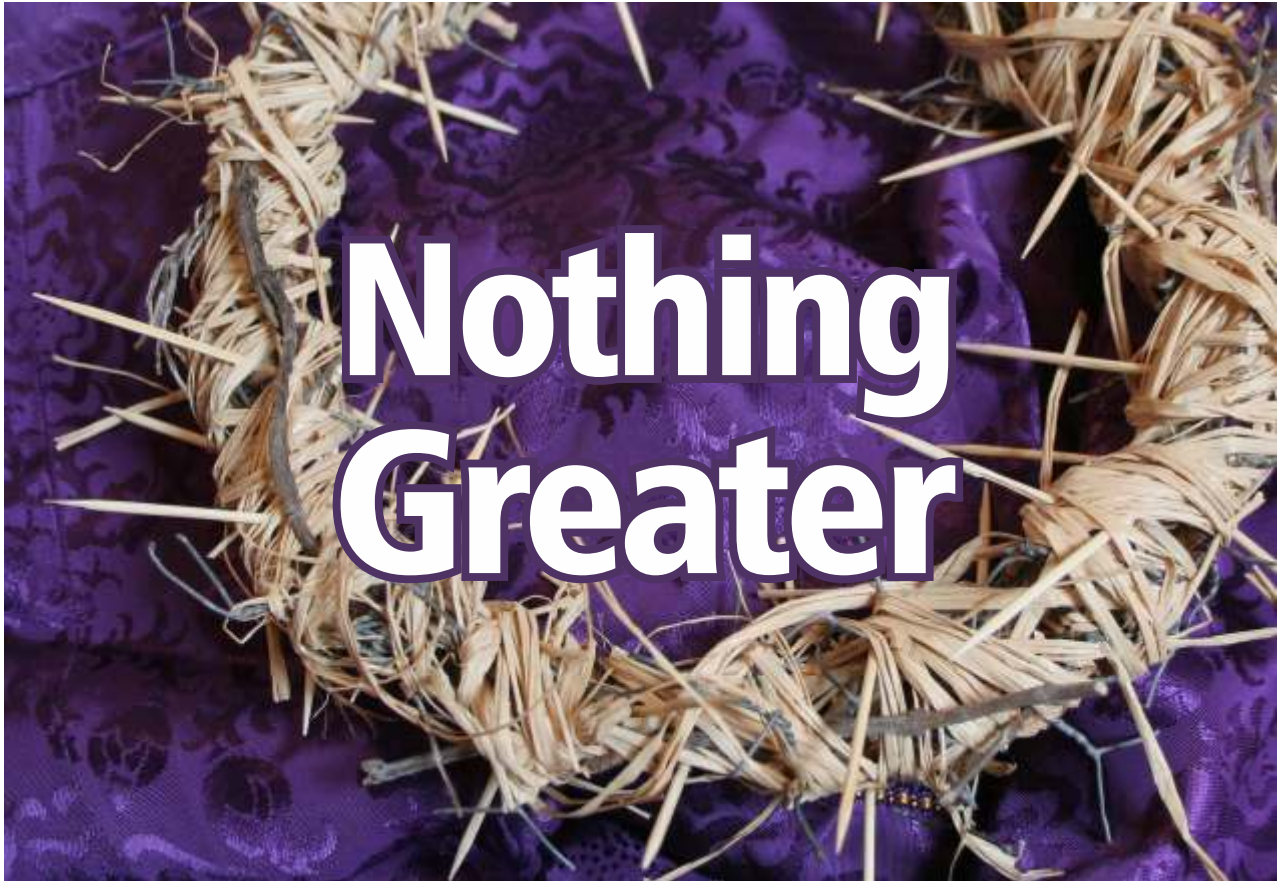
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**Look at the birds of
the air: they neither
sow nor reap nor
gather into barns, and
yet your heavenly
Father feeds them. Are
you not of more value
than they?**

(Matthew 6:26 ESV)



Painting by Leah Anderson



Nothing Greater

Many assert that Shakespeare, Dickens and Rowling are great writers. However, their works pale in comparison to the Bible.

Take the inspired Psalm 22 for example. It begins with the famous cry, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,” uttered by the dying Jesus Christ over 1000 years later.

Just as they ridiculed Jesus, “He saved others, but can't save himself,” the same ridicule is aimed at the one afflicted in the Psalm. Before his terrifying ordeal intensified, he is identified as trusting in God even from the womb, reminiscent and certainly prophetic of Christ who was conceived of the Holy Spirit.

Then he's surrounded by men, poetically described as “dogs” and “bulls,” just as Christ was set upon by a Roman garrison who brutally whipped and tortured Him.

The Psalm illustrates that the afflicted one was poured out like water, had his bones out of joint, his

tongue clinging to his jaw and his bones could be counted, things all characteristic of a bloody, painful and thirsty death of one hanging naked on a cross. He then meets the dreadful fate of having his hands and feet pierced. Verse 10 also says they cast lots for his clothes, just as it happened to Jesus.

The Divine inspiration of this prophetic Psalm is undeniable and further exemplified by the fact crucifixion was not even invented in 1000BC, the time of the Psalm's writing.

The Psalm concludes with the afflicted and no doubt deceased one being resurrected to life and the ends of the earth worshipping him.

No wonder the Bible is by far the world's most printed and published book ever. No other writing comes close in terms of inspired brilliance.

Jesus Christ's life was forecast extensively because God wants us to know that, without doubt, Jesus is the only way to Him! □

*David Kidd,
Pastor, New Zealand*

Be Still, and Know God

Be still and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the nations, and I will be exalted in the earth. (Psalm 46:10)



Psalm 46 reminds us that God is in control of this world, no matter how broken it may appear.

David wrote it, rejoicing following a major defeat. For the sake of space, we could also remind ourselves of a similar event:

And when the servant of the man of God arose early to go out, behold, a host compassed the city with horses and chariots. Then his servant said unto him, "Alas master, how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them., Then Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I beseech thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the servant, and he looked, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. (2 Kings 6:15-17)

The word "still" in Psalm 46:10 is translated as, in order of frequency: feeble, fail, weaken, alone, idle, forsake, cease. Note that these words are talking about our actions, what we do.

Can we choose to be feeble or weak? Hebrews 11:34 tells us that the people of faith who were weak, were made strong. Can we choose to "fail" – meaning that failing in the things of this world is knowing that God has a better way that He wants us to do things.

Can we choose to weaken ourselves? Weakness is not a weakness if it allows God on our side. A person who looks very strong physically and mentally may in fact be quite weak because they depend on what their physical body can achieve rather than what God can do through them. God does not need a six-pack man with bulging biceps. He does not need a brain with the highest achievement. These people could be in a very weak spiritual position. God specializes in taking ordinary things and making them extraordinary. It is the spiritual things that will endure. The physical things of this world pass away at some point.

"Stillness and solitude" can mean being alone. Being alone in this world can be a challenge for us, but Jesus teaches us that He is always with us through the Holy Spirit. When it seems that we are alone, separated from other humans, that may be the best time to look for Jesus in our lives. We are less distracted by the cares of this world that often involve other people.

Being still is to avoid doing anything rashly and to faithfully wait. It requires us to be idle of worldly pursuits, so that our attention can be focussed elsewhere. As we hustle and bustle along the busy roads of this life, we may be too preoccupied to see what God is trying to show us. We need to stop and see what God wants us to see. Many religious people, who accordingly take their faith seriously, often fall into the trap of being so busy with God's work, they do not have much quiet time with the Lord.

Being still means that we give-up and forsake those things that are not helping our relationship with God. Giving up anything is hard at first. It is when we give up things that go against God, that we open ourselves for greater heavenly blessings. This is an important lesson throughout scripture.

Practising being still is not necessarily passive. It can be active. It requires us to do something, but not what we instinctively feel we need to do. Being still needs a conscious effort to be made to do something so that we do not interfere with what God is doing or is planning to do.

The Hebrew word for "know" is yada, and is comprised of the two words Yad and A. Yad means hand and A means eye. In other words, we get knowledge when we use our hand and our eyes to discover something. We see it and touch it and therefore experience it. It is important that both are connected. Neither one is sufficient by themselves. In fact, if we only use one sense we easily get into trouble.

Have you ever bought something from a TV commercial, only to find that it was not exactly what you were looking for? Commercials whether on TV, in catalogues or in magazines use colour and sound to attract. Billboards do the same thing. It seems that our eyes are very dominant in making decisions, but what we need to know is that they can lead us astray. Young adults unfortunately have this problem if they only act on their eyes. Not every beautiful woman is the right wife. Not every handsome man is the best husband.

Surrendering ourselves to God is not a sign of weakness. It is a message to Him that we want to completely depend on Him. We will take whatever answer He gives us. It takes faith in God sometimes not to act so that He can do what He wants. It takes to trust God, and tough situations show whether we trust Him more or the arm of man. Surrendering to

God is easy to talk about but not easy to do. Words are cheap. We need look no further than the disciples' experience of 2000 years ago.

In Luke 5, Simon, an accomplished fisherman, had been out all night fishing and caught nothing. As it was, along came Jesus, a novice fisherman. Simon has heard about Jesus' reputation. The question was: will he obey?

In the same way, Jesus comes to us and pursues us. At some point He will ask you to do something and your life experience will instinctively resist: "No way! This sounds impossible!" What Simon did not know was that the King of the Universe was personally coming to him to help his faith. If he rejected this chance, would he have faith to follow Jesus? Fortunately, this question is irrelevant. We see that Simon, maybe because of the things that he saw and heard about Jesus, was now ready to be still and to know God. He obeyed Jesus, and came face to face with divinity.

We can all possibly testify that when we're at rock bottom, and don't know what to do or what can be done, the Lord provides an amazing answer. In the words of Paul: *"The things which eye hath not seen, neither ear hath heard, neither came into man's heart, are, which God hath prepared for them that love him."* (1 Corinthians 2:9)

It is tempting to panic when something overwhelming happens, just like Elijah's servant. Elijah, however, knew better. Likewise, on the road to Damascus, Paul experienced a wonder when he took the leap of faith to stop his intended mission, and listen to Jesus' calling.

Seek seasons of solitude, silence and stillness, and you too will experience life's ongoing miracles. □

*Daniel Mahr
Tokyo, Japan*

**"Be still,
and know that
I am God."**

Psalms 46:10

The LORD calls us to holiness, truth and righteousness, in word and deed. This starts by total obedience and submission to our Lord Jesus Christ — He is our sufficiency, our identity and our truth.

It was Jesus who paid our redemptive price through His suffering and blood, grants us His righteousness, and justifies us to live a sanctified life.

God's demonstration of grace is nothing less than expensive grace!

“

History is remembered for its heroes, those who overcame great obstacles and adversity, to finally overcome self, the world and Satan, and follow a higher calling through our Lord Jesus Christ to receive the "Crown of Life".

Far from being spectators, we're called to be the victors in this life, to undertake great exploits, win challenging battles, all the while never taking our eyes from the promised grace freely offered to the faithful and righteous in Jesus Christ.

”

CAN YOU FIND THE WORDS?

SYUTBEJXAFLEXJKSWZSFEBEULCWLY
ASESJOBPSICSGEZEMYJZPYPGSYTMR
NNVWOKHWNFXQESGWMFWZBFVMMXWJ
CEGXRGGSQQPUBGHAHEABXXQCLCWWM
TWKPPGMZMVHJFEKYQIIIXMBWHJCPP
IRSFMSSEPLPQGVMYHLZTXJIDEJEGLY
FSAJJPPJKKINGDOMLFUHUHUSYRZKPG
IRNVGURZPXKLLLOANNLHAPGWRVAISO
EYMIIVNSHZBAPTISMEYMSRESAESRVPK
DNXYAATWYQMTXPXHJIIIVOYGDWNADGD
QWGLYUISVFKGHRTWVTHGTQLNAWBNUK
GCYEKAFPPQUREVELATIONXOERULCJM
GCVNRIIHTEMPLERHYOGJKURTDRECEQ
YUVZFOCRGRJJFMSCXVXDVIKZWSDMQ
EAODBWAIEDMUCHBTWZIQBEFWXRJJFM
NCVOZVTUSRESURRECTIONINPQTKLH
IRPYVXIFYODHPIAVQQOOWSENENUHV
VCLKVVONMHPEFNKPMMIJSFDEUEKJAF
MYAEVUNUVKIHNOJBYSYFMIHGIIUVFS
PXYSSEKKHGCPHGEVJSALVATIONOYS
OHTGPNMJJONRWUCLXDIDISCIPLESHIP
PGCPRTPPLXJCLYIEJEZMSRGVUIRZE
GOZPOWJVDDYDFXEJEDQMRALYHDTRN
UVLBPYLFMUMZAAANVKSYPHVULPQPIXXW
SUSPHGRACEBAVSEVUPRUGOXMPENDAH
TQWKERYUSXCNKIXCSNUGUTOAADSSQ
NPNHCDCKMPRLMDWBLEWFYHUNDWZRY
NLGBYGTOFOAYHCOPVYXXWCGXYNVDDU
HXASAMONQLRHWGNIYBFQOQGGKOWUAPW
DJOOPHBGRXMKSLQUGLOVEGZNASZIHJ

**HOLY
LOVE
GLORIFIED
REWARD
RESURRECTION
BAPTISM
SALVATION
PROPHECY
SPIRIT
JESUS**

**TEMPLE
SANCTIFIED
PARABLES
BELIEVE
JUSTIFICATION
GRACE
REVELATION
DISCIPLESHIP
KINGDOM
FAITH**

Watch this video series. Exploring the essential Biblical doctrines of the Church of God (Seventh Day).

This We Believe

<https://www.cog7au/believe>

Deny Yourself

We read of Jesus in the scriptures: “When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.” (Mark 8:34)

One of the things that enables us to deny self is to embrace the truth that we are loved, cherished, and nurtured by God. Then we can face up to the depravity of our fallen nature. Though saved by the grace and blood of Christ we continue to battle with the embedded facets of our old self. But through the indwelling Spirit of God, we can say no to their power and persuasion, and refuse to let them control us.

Another part of this denial is to radically surrender to Jesus, identify with Him, be yoked with Him, and lose your life for His glory and purposes.

Then we must be fighting for the freedom of being preoccupied and even consumed with ourselves, our security, image, perceived rights, and honour. It truly is a work of His Spirit for us to be able to radically reorient ourselves away from having self as centre.

Becoming free of self helps us not boast of status and worldly honours, we are willing to suffer for others, the cause of Christ, and the gospel. The world will never understand the bondage of self and the freedom of denial. Yet, there is sweet rest to be found in the surrendering to the lover of our soul!

I urge you to leave the safe and small pleasures of a self-protected life for the delights of our Lord. The pain of self-denial is a path to our exceeding joy. □

*Brian Larsen
Spokane, USA*



Letting Go!

I have been thinking about the subject of “letting go.”

It is not easy to let go of things you have put your heart and soul into, and there is an element of grief involved as well. Grief is a human reaction to loss. Sometimes if we are unprepared, it can catch us by surprise!

At the end of last year, I picked up my granddaughter Charlize from preschool. She is our son’s fourth child, and I have done this each week for the three other grandchildren as well. Same day, same time and same place.

I buckled her in and sat in the driver’s seat, and then it hit me. I was a bit teary when Charlize asked, “What’s wrong, grandma?”

I said, “I just realised this is my last day picking you up at preschool!”

She rolled her eyes and said, “You will be okay.” She had already let go and looking forward to big school.

The problem was that I had not prepared or even gave it a thought until the last minute. We all encounter situations of having to let go. I guess I now better understand Jesus’ words: “Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted.” (Matthew 5:4) □

*Debbey Haitsma
Canberra, ACT*



UNDER OPEN SKIES

Feasting on the food of faith and fellowship

On Sabbath, 20 January 2024, just outside of Canberra, an amazing weekend was experienced.

Our dear friends hosted a spiritual retreat – opening their hearts and home to nearly 30 individuals – children, youths, and elders from Sydney, ACT, and as far as Juneec.

Idyllic and tranquil, with a backdrop of nature's splendour, the location gave us the sense that we had entered Shangri-La. From the moment of arriving, the Sabbath felt like a celebration – birds were singing outside, and inside, people were playing piano and later there was even the blowing of the shofar. (A Sabbath isn't fully complete unless trumpets are involved – a lesson I recently learned while in Nigeria). Their home was full of conversation and feasting on food of faith and fellowship.

The heart of our worship service was led by a message, which navigated us through the complex theme of "Righteous Judging". All involved

become both student and teacher, contributing insights, sharing experiences and expanding on scriptural knowledge. Despite the comprehensive pages of notes that were prepared, only a fraction was covered – a testament to the congregation's eager participation and the depth of spiritual wisdom that was generously shared.

Our hosts' home served as a sanctuary of hospitality. Conversation over meals reminded us that our faith is as much about communion with others as it is about communion with our Creator. An afternoon swim by both the young and older in the pool offered a refreshing respite. The more adventurous walked down the valley, returning with spoils of fresh blackberries.

What lessons of encouragement from fellowship and study could one take away from such a blessed opportunity?

- **The Strength of Shared Beliefs** – Unity is not uniformity; it is the harmonious diversity of thoughts centred around a common faith that fortifies us.

- **The Bond of Generational Wisdom** – Elders and youth exchange roles seamlessly, proving that wisdom doesn't discriminate by age and that every generation has something sacred to offer.
- **The Joy of Gathering in Faith** – Joy is a fruit of the Spirit, most flavourful when shared. Echoes of laughter, the sharing of meals, and the collective worship under the vast, open skies are the threads that weave us into a tighter community.

As Sunday dawned, we were welcomed with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and the promise of a hearty breakfast of sausages, hash browns, home-grown eggs and all complimented with fresh sourdough (not sure if someone was baking bread at 2am).

Some brave souls camped out, while others enjoyed the comfort of a bed, but all were united in the warmth of fellowship. With full stomachs and fuller hearts, the farewells are a mere pause, not an end, as everyone looked forward to reconvening again, remotely, online or what we're hoping may become a regular tradition at our friend's country home.

Over the weekend, we lived the truth that our gatherings strengthen the fabric of our church community. As we departed, each of us carried a piece of this shared experience, a reminder that together, we are stronger, wiser, and more joyous.

With much anticipation for the next gathering where we will once again fellowship under open skies. □

*Omar Afiouni
Sydney, NSW*



Photos by Debbey Haitsma



In the intricate fabric of church life, the words we speak hold immense power. Words have the capability to uplift or cause harm, and this is particularly significant in the context of gossip.

The Bible, rich in wisdom, offers profound insights into the nature of our speech and the dangers of idle chatter. Gossip is a complex blend of truth and untruths, often starting as something seemingly benign – a shared concern or a quietly passed story. Yet, its true nature is far from harmless.

The Scriptures warn us about the destructive power of gossip. Proverbs 16:28 (NKJV) cautions, “A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends.” This highlights the insidious nature of gossip, and the power it has to erode trust and break the bonds of friendship.

Gossip often finds its roots in deception, echoing the tactics of Satan. In John 8:44, Jesus describes him as “the father of lies.” Engaging in gossip aligns us, perhaps unknowingly, with falsehood, contrasting sharply with the truth that Christ embodies. Jesus said in John 14:6, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” As followers of Christ, we are called to a higher standard of speech that reflects our commitment to truth and holiness.

The Bible also speaks to our human tendency to be drawn toward lies. In 2 Timothy 4:3-4, we are

warned, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” This scripture conveys a sobering reality that there is a deep-seated desire in people to believe lies, especially when these lies align with their own preconceptions.

The consequences of gossip and lies are significant. Ephesians 4:25 urges us, “Therefore, putting away lying, ‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour,’ for we are members of one another.” This instruction is not just about avoiding untruths but also about fostering unity and trust within the community of believers.

Gossip can also masquerade as genuine concern, veiled in a guise of righteousness. Individuals might divulge personal details of others under the pretext of seeking advice or requesting prayers. However, such actions can sometimes stem from hidden malice or offence. It is essential to scrutinise our intentions and those of the information sharers. Are we safeguarding or damaging? Are we healing or tarnishing?

Gossip extends beyond just disseminating misinformation; it can rob people of their reputation, income, relationships, and trust. As Christians, called to “Love your neighbour as yourself” (Mark 12:31), participating in rumour

spreading falls drastically short of this directive. The presence of gossip within church community – a place intended for fellowship, support, and spiritual growth – is particularly alarming. James 3:10 points out this contradiction in the first century church: “Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.” Church leaders and members alike can succumb to, engage in, and propagate gossip, fuelling a spiritual malady that jeopardises relationships, families, and congregational harmony.

In confronting gossip, Proverbs 26:20 offers valuable insight: “Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; And where there is no talebearer, strife ceases.” This implies a conscious choice to refrain from participating in, contributing to, or encouraging gossip. Have we ever said, “It’s a secret; don’t tell anyone?”

It is imperative to examine our own motives in sharing information. Are we genuinely concerned, or are we cloaked in a facade of righteousness, serving our own interests? Philippians 2:3-4 reminds us to value others above ourselves, looking not only to our own interests but also to the interests of others. Expressing opinions about others can lead to unintended, negative consequences.

Our words wield the power to either build up or destroy. As members of the Body of Christ, we should strive to align our speech with Christ’s love and truth. This also involves scrutinising our hearts and motives to ensure they resonate with biblical teachings. Proverbs 18:21 states, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, And those who love it will eat its fruit.”

May we commit to using our words to nurture life, fostering community where truth and love prevail. □

*Susan Heming
Newcastle, NSW*

**“If you abide in Me,
and my words
abide in you...”**

TOO LATE ? TO CHANGE ♦

Perhaps you feel it wouldn’t be right becoming a Christian late in life.

Perhaps your sense of honour causes you to feel it wrong to seek God’s gift of eternal life through Christ at the eleventh hour. However, may the story of the thief on the cross override any “honour” hindering you from enjoying your blessed eternal destiny.

The thief was cursing Christ on the cross next to him, but something changed in him. The blasphemy of another criminal, who was also cursing Christ, caused him to cry out “Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?”

Beholding the honourable way Christ suffered and perhaps the unusual daytime darkness (historically verified from sources outside the Bible), he even repentantly confessed he deserved punishment for his sins, and declared Jesus had done nothing wrong. Then, at death’s door, he stretched out his hand of faith remarkably inviting a dying man on a cross to be His Saviour.

Wonderfully, it was not too late for him to change and to be accepted into God’s eternal kingdom. Christ that day assured him they would be in Paradise together.

If it was not too late for a dying thief on a cross, it’s not too late for you either! Christ paid a terrible price for our sins. It would be far more dishonourable to reject a last-minute reprieve than to be an eleventh-hour disciple of Christ, since Christ’s loving sacrifice for you would have been in vain. □

*David Kidd
New Zealand*

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