

# THE LIVING CHURCH NEWS

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## Fight the Indoctrination of Our Youth!

### *Dear Brethren,*

Dennis Prager is a well-educated man and highly respected—not someone you would want to find on the opposite side of a debate. He and Adam Carolla reside on opposite sides of the political spectrum, but team up routinely. Their agreement comes from a genuine respect for one another and from their opposition to the divisive directions in which America is heading, especially on its university campuses. Together, they produced the insightful documentary *No Safe Spaces*.

Prager recently gave this warning: “I have a motto. I tell parents, first of all, unless they have to, they shouldn’t send their kids to college. Number two, sending your kids to college is playing Russian roulette with their values.... Except the chambers with bullets are greater than the chambers without bullets. So the chance that your kid will come home and honor you, his parents, honor this country, honor liberty, are very close to zero” (“The Candace Owens Show: Dennis Prager,” *PragerU.com*, April 12, 2020).

This was a warning about a takeover in education, not an anti-education rant. Prager is probably best known for the video shorts released by PragerU, in which he enlists a variety of speakers to educate people on biblical and Western values. But, as with anything produced by man, it is a mixture of truth and error. His videos on the Ten Commandments are as good as you will find, but we must be circumspect when it comes to “Western values.” Too many, even among Church members, incorrectly put the Constitution of the United States, the Canadian Charter of Rights, or various other national documents on the same level as the Bible. It is true that much of Western civilization is built on Judeo-Christian values—but that does not mean that our nations have followed those values. And

Western values of governance are not God’s. Our nations have never been truly Christian—but, to the extent that we once followed biblical principles of honesty, caring for others, fidelity in marriage, etc., those values produced blessings. And those values are being turned upside down today.

### **It’s Not Just College**

The danger goes far beyond university-level education. Our children are being indoctrinated from the earliest ages with non-biblical ideologies. Your first grader is likely reading about children with “two mommies,” learning that his country is systemically racist and unjust, and being told that gender is fluid. To be sure, there is racism and injustice in every country—but Britain ended slavery throughout its vast empire with the Slavery Abolition Act of August 1833, and America fought its Civil War, the bloodiest war in its history, to end slavery. Laws and wars do not change the hearts of men, but Britain and America have come a long way from where they once were.

Though we should decry injustice and racism, they should not surprise us. Isaiah decried the lack of justice in Israel (Isaiah 59:14–15), and Jesus warned that the world at the end of this age would suffer from ethnic violence and wars (Matthew 24:7, in which “nation” is translated from the Greek *ethnos*). We have made it clear in our magazines that racism is wrong. It is a sin—and it is still being used to separate us. The U.S. civil rights movement of the 1960s and ’70s was a plea for equality based on ability and character rather than skin color, but today many value color over character in a new kind of racism. And the attack on God’s institution of marriage should not surprise us, as it was foretold long ago (Jeremiah 9:2).

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How sad it is that children are indoctrinated into victimhood—being told that society is so unfair that the only solution is to turn Western civilization toward a socialism more akin to Cuba or Venezuela, where the government acts as Mommy and Daddy and where your success in life is in someone else’s hands. Obviously, stating this can sound political, but we cannot stray from telling the truth just because a truth has been turned into a political “football.” There is a clear and present danger in the philosophies being promoted in academia and popular culture.

## How sad it is that children are indoctrinated into victimhood—being told that society is so unfair that the only solution is to turn Western civilization toward a socialism more akin to Cuba or Venezuela, **where the government acts as Mommy and Daddy and where your success in life is in someone else’s hands.**

I recently had a conversation with one of our field ministers who was concerned that our children in the Church are picking up on these trends. Even homeschooled children are not immune, and that *is* troubling. Electronic media and popular culture are all-pervasive. Young people are aware of celebrities and pop culture, and even sports stars have become advocates for destructive ideas that they themselves do not fully understand. Only a few in Hollywood and in the media are now beginning to wake up, as “cancel culture” is eating its own.

How do we save our children from dangerous ideas? The Internet is a beast of its own and is ultimately controlled by no one other than the god of this age, the spirit “who now works in the sons of disobedience.” But there are some steps we can take.

We must first make sure that we are not caught up in the trends of this world. We appreciate freedom of speech, as it allows us to preach the truth—for now—but let us not put free speech on a pedestal above the word of God. The Bible prescribes limits far more strict than those of Western courts, especially

American courts (Deuteronomy 13). We are *not* to impose these penalties under the New Covenant, but they do show the mind of God. The media outlets are stirring up anger and hatred—don’t let the spirit behind the course of this world suck you in!

If you want to know what Satan is promoting, just watch television ads and programming. Few directly say, “Shack up outside of marriage,” or “Become a homosexual, or transsexual”—but what they do is present these behaviors as normal in everything from sitcoms, to HGTV programs where couples remodel homes, to advertisements. What are they showing? That is what they are actively promoting through example. They make it all look normal. Don’t be fooled!

We must also monitor what our children are learning. If they are in public or private school, this is difficult. Even math class will deliberately promote the LGBTQ+ agenda. Teachers are taught to normalize deviant behaviors, and math questions can be subtly framed: “Mary and Susie are getting married. They can purchase invitation cards for \$4.95 per dozen or \$6.76 for 18. Which is the better bargain?” Even homeschool textbooks may use this kind of tactic.

We must also spend time with our children. One value lost decades ago was the value of family meals every evening. Work schedules sometimes make this difficult or impossible, but this should be a goal and high priority for families—absolutely so on Friday evenings, but also on every day of the week. Parents put great emphasis on after-school activities, but these often take away from sharing meals together. And there needs to be a rule at the dinner table—no electronics. Undivided attention needs to flow between parents and children.

### **Protect Them with Truth**

We live in a far more dangerous world than we may realize. And the greatest danger most of our children face at the mo-

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## Life After Death: What Does the Old Testament Teach?

**D**oes the Old Testament offer eternal life? Not according to one prominent scholar. *Time* magazine published an article by Bart D. Ehrman titled, “What Jesus Really Said About Heaven and Hell” (May 8, 2020). Ehrman’s credentials are impressive. *Time* describes him as “a Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,” and “a leading authority on the New Testament and the history of early Christianity.” With such impressive qualifications, we would expect that whatever he wrote must be true—but was he correct in writing the following?

The Hebrew Bible itself assumes that the dead are simply dead—that their body lies in the grave, and there is no consciousness, ever again.... And so, traditional Israelites did not believe in life after death, only death after death. That is what made death so mournful: nothing could make an afterlife existence sweet, since there was no life at all, and thus no family, friends, conversations, food, drink—no communion even with God. God would forget the person and the person could not even worship. The most one could hope for was a good and particularly long life here and now.

Professor Ehrman is hardly alone in this opinion, which you can readily find elsewhere among so-called “Bible scholars.” Is this what the Bible—specifically the Old Testament—tells us? Or is this merely an opinion of historians and elite university professors? And if “Bible scholars” are wrong about this, what other errors may they be promoting?

To be fair, Ehrman is *not* wrong about everything in his *Time* article. Some of what he writes is true—albeit shocking to many professing Christians. For example, he describes the soul as mortal, not as something that immediately goes off to heavenly bliss or hellish punishment at death. That is true, but a careful reading of his article indicates that he views the Bible as being comprised of—and Jesus as bringing forth—various human ideas. Ehrman does not tremble before the word of God and understand it as just that—the divinely inspired word of God (Isaiah 66:1–2).

How many fail to understand that countless so-called theologians do not take the Bible literally, but view it as a philosophy book made up of humanly devised tales? James Moffatt translated the Bible—no easy task—yet he wrote that the Hebrew text he translated was “often desperately corrupt” and called the Old Testament texts “uncertain and precarious” in parts, a combination of different “strata” that have been “fused and confused” (*The Old Testament: A New Translation*, 1924, vol. 1, pp. viii, x). How could we place any trust in the Bible’s teachings if this were the case?

Let us look at the Old Testament scriptures, which we know to be part of the inspired word of our very Creator Himself, and see what they say about life after death.

### No Ever-Living Soul

Surprising to many, nowhere does the Bible say that the soul is immortal—in that, Professor Ehrman is correct. He is also correct that when we die, we die; we do not go to heaven or “hell” upon death. What is sometimes translated *hell* in the Old Testament is, in fact, the Hebrew word *Sheol*, which simply means the grave—nothing more and nothing less. Here is proof.

When God created Adam, He told him that if he ate of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” he would “surely die” (Genesis 2:17), and his wife Eve understood this to be the case. It was the devil, in the guise of a serpent, who introduced the idea that “you shall surely die” did not *really* mean death: “And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.”’ Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die’” (Genesis 3:2–4).

The Bible does not teach that we *have* a soul, but rather that we *are* a soul, as I asked and answered in our resource *John 3:16: Hidden Truths of the Golden Verse*:

So, what is the human soul? The word “soul” in the Old Testament comes from the Hebrew word *nephesh*, and merely means “a creature.” For example, the first time the word “soul” is used in the *King James Version* is in Genesis

2:7, where we read, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” This alone should cause us to pause. Note that it says “a *living* soul.” Would that not indicate the possibility of a *dead* soul? The *New King James Version* translates it in a way that leads to less confusion, stating that “man became a living being” (p. 49).

*Nephesh* is also used to describe other living creatures (e.g., Genesis 1:20). Whatever else a *nephesh* is, it is clearly stated in the Hebrew scriptures that it is mortal. A simple word study on the subject ought to put any doubt to rest. The Hebrew priests were not to “go near any dead body [*nephesh*]” (Leviticus 21:11). And the book of Ezekiel states emphatically that “the soul [*nephesh*] who sins shall die” (18:4, 20).

Further, we see in the Hebrew scriptures that death means death—not bliss in heaven or torture in hell. “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (Ecclesiastes 9:10). “For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?” (Psalm 6:5). “Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help. His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day his plans perish” (Psalm 146:3–4; cf. Psalm 30:9).

But does all of this mean that death is the end, and that there is no hope for life after death? Is this what the Old Testament teaches? And, if not, how can we reconcile that with the scriptures we just read?

### Hope for the Dead

From the very beginning of Scripture, we see that God has something special in mind for mankind. He did not make us according to any animal kind, but according to a special kind. After creating other strange, beautiful, and wonderful creatures for sea, air, and land, “God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’” (Genesis 1:26). Do you realize how profound that statement is? Consider what it says: Mankind was made according to the God kind!

The truth that mankind was made in the image and likeness of God ought to wake us up to realize God has a great purpose for creating us—something far greater than eternal retirement. He has given us a calling so great that it could never be fulfilled in our flawed physical existence. King David recognized this purpose, and understood that he would not be in the full likeness of God, experiencing life on another level, until he was resurrected from the dead. “As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied *when I awake in Your likeness*” (Psalm 17:15).

And there are more direct proofs that the Old Testament scriptures offer hope of eternal life. All three major prophets attest to this fact. In one millennial passage, Isaiah said, “He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces” (Isaiah 25:8). Some may try to explain away the clear significance of this, but can there be any doubt that Isaiah believed in life after death when he wrote, “Your dead shall live; together *with my dead body they shall arise*. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (Isaiah 26:19)?

What about Jeremiah? Did he believe in life after death? Jeremiah stated on more than one occasion that King David, who had been in his grave for several hundred years by that time, will be resurrected to life at the end of the age. “But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, *whom I will raise up* for them” (Jeremiah 30:9). Some think this is a reference to Christ, the promised descendant of David—but notice that those described “serve the LORD their God, *and* David their king.”

God also affirms this through the third of the major prophets. Speaking of this same future time, He says, “I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd” (Ezekiel 34:23). Now, notice again in the next verse that this is speaking *not* of Christ, but of King David himself: “And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken” (v. 24; cf. Ezekiel 37:24–25).

### An Awakening for Many

We also read in Ezekiel 37 about a valley of dry bones, and of a great multitude of people—specifically, the “whole house of Israel”—being resurrected from the dead. For a full explanation of this crucial resurrection, see our booklet *Is This the Only Day of Salvation?*

Daniel was another great servant of God, and he also recorded hope in the resurrection of multitudes. Describing the end of the age (Daniel 12:4), he recorded this inspired passage:

At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And *many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt*. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:1–3).

Note that Daniel refers to “every one who is found written in the book” (v. 1). What is this book? David refers to it in Psalm 69 where he speaks of the wicked and declares, “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous” (v. 28).

This book of life is also referenced in the last book of the Old Testament in these terms:

Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard them; so a *book of remembrance was written* before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name. “They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “on the day that I make them My jewels [special treasure]. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him” (Malachi 3:16–17).

It is already difficult to understand this “book of the living” and “book of remembrance” in any terms not referring to life after death, but the New Testament scriptures put it in plain language. Paul wrote to one of the congregations of his day, “And I urge you also, true companion, help these women who labored with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life” (Philippians 4:3).

In Revelation, John on seven occasions refers to the “Book of Life”—in which are written the names of those who may

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enter the future New Jerusalem. The wicked will be excluded. “But there shall by no means enter it [New Jerusalem] anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (Revelation 21:27).

If you have attended a funeral conducted by a Christian minister, you may have heard the following powerful passage from the book of Job, in which this Old Testament figure asks and answers his own question: “If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change [or *transformation*] comes. You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of your hands” (Job 14:14–15). Can anything be clearer?

### How Can This Be?

So, with all this biblical proof demonstrating that Moses, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Malachi, and Job

believed in the resurrection from the dead, how can a distinguished professor, a “leading authority on the New Testament and the history of early Christianity,” conclude the following?

And so, traditional Israelites did not believe in life after death, only death after death. That is what made death so mournful: nothing could make an afterlife existence sweet, since there was no life at all, and thus no family, friends, conversations, food, drink—no communion even with God. God would forget the person....

As we have seen, Professor Ehrman is not *entirely* wrong. He is correct that “the soul” is not immortal. He is correct that we do not immediately go to heavenly bliss or hellish punishment upon death.

However, he is totally off-base when he says that the Old Testament does not hold out the hope of life after death. As we have seen, the Hebrew scriptures do reveal a resurrection from the dead. Job understood this. Daniel wrote of a future resurrection. King David expected to see God’s face upon being resurrected with God’s likeness. Isaiah expected to be resurrected. And Jeremiah and Ezekiel proclaimed David’s future role as King over Israel when Christ rules as King over all the earth.

It is true that some Jews in the first century AD did not believe in the resurrection. We read of an interesting exchange between Jesus and “some of the Sadducees” who denied a resurrection (Luke 20:27–33). Their hypothetical question mocked the idea of life after death, but Jesus turned the tables on them when He appealed to their own Hebrew scriptures. “But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him” (Luke 20:37–38).

Denial of the resurrection was far from universal at that time. The Apostle Paul used this fact to divide his accusers:

But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!” And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection—and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both (Acts 23:6–8).

**LIFE AFTER DEATH** continues on page 21



# Who Is on the Lord's Side?

By **Rod McNair**

**W**hen Moses received the Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai, he may have expected to return to a “hero’s welcome” in the camp of Israel. But that didn’t happen. Instead of having a happy reunion with a grateful nation, he was shocked to find the children of Israel dancing and reveling around a golden calf. The children of Israel had pledged to worship and revere God alone. They had solemnly promised to leave their sinful, idolatrous ways behind them—but now, they had grievously dishonored that covenant.

In the rush of events that happened next, what stands out is Moses’ *challenge* to the whole congregation to declare where their loyalties were. The account is relayed in Exodus:

Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, “Whoever is on the LORD’s side—come to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him (Exodus 32:25–26).

Moses challenged the children of Israel to examine their priorities. There was no waffling or sitting on the fence now; they had to decide whether they were on God’s side or not.

That challenge is worthwhile for us to consider today. Our world is increasingly polarized and there is a powerful temptation to take sides, even on political issues. The political issues that became enflamed last year have only become more heated.

Each year at the Feast of Trumpets, we are reminded of the big picture—that at Jesus’ return to the earth, He will come as a conquering King. When His Kingdom rules on earth, His servants will take up His cause and fight to establish His rule. Revelation gives a glimpse of that event: “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.... And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses” (Revelation 19:11, 14).

Christ and the saints will rule over the earth for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4, 6), and then the Great White Throne Judgment will begin. Against the backdrop of the chaos and the outright street fights that increasing polarization has brought to even “peaceful” areas of our world, this is the cause that we must focus on—the establishment of the Kingdom of God.

But that Kingdom is not here yet. So, how do we respond to the pressures that try to pull us into the causes of this world? How do we make sure we *stay on the Lord’s side*?

## **Conservative, Liberal, or Christian?**

As members of God’s Church, we may find ourselves on the same side as “conservatives” on certain issues. On other issues, we may share values with political “liberals.” However, true political conservatives and liberals are often aghast to find out that members of God’s Church are actually *apolitical* and don’t get involved in politics.

If there’s one thing politically active Americans cannot stand, it’s people who do not vote! Why *don’t* we vote? Because no political party has the ultimate answers, and God is the One who places leaders in positions of power. What if God’s will is to raise up a certain leader to accomplish His own purpose, and we vote against that candidate? We could actually be opposing God’s will by casting our vote.

We must not be swayed by the false argument that getting involved politically is somehow our Christian duty. It’s actually just the opposite—our Christian duty is to stand for God’s cause and not take sides with human political forces.

Could members of God’s Church someday in the future face increasing pressure to become politically active? Absolutely. Actually, it has happened before. Some of our brethren, particularly in countries outside the United States, have faced *immense pressure* to get involved in local causes and conflicts. Some decades ago, one of our faithful Church members lived in an area suffering under insurrectionists’ battles with government forces. This member was pressured by both sides to join with them in the armed conflict—and one force was a “Christian” militia. The man faced a very dangerous situation personally—economically, too, since he had a successful local business. But after counseling with his pastor and being

strengthened by Christ's warning that "all who take the sword will perish by the sword," he determined to resist the temptations from both sides and trust in God. God blessed and protected him and his family, and he continues to serve as a faithful leader and elder to this day.

To him, the pressure was not theoretical or hypothetical. Others undoubtedly have faced similar situations. What if you or I were put under that kind of pressure? Could we unintentionally be dragged into false causes?

### Fighting over Deck Chairs

There is a saying that when someone is bustling around in a frenzy of activity in support of a losing cause, they are, in effect, "rearranging deck chairs on the *Titanic*." No matter how well you rearrange the chairs on the deck of the *Titanic*, it's still going to sink—in other words, we shouldn't spend time on futile efforts.

Today, however, political groups are not just rearranging these deck chairs; they are fighting over these deck chairs. Do we really want to get caught up in that? Or do we want to take a third option and get off the sinking ship altogether? If we think about this world as the *Titanic*, God's people got off the boat long ago (1 John 2:15). This world—the boat—is sinking. It is Satan's world, built on lust, greed, and pride—sinful attitudes that lead to self-destruction. When we were baptized, we made the decision to come out of this world and be different (Revelation 18:4). We turned our back on the world, and now we are striving to follow God and His cause faithfully. We shouldn't be fighting over what is on the boat if we are *already off the boat*.

But is that all there is to it—to get off the ship and never look back? Did God just call us to save ourselves? Or are we supposed to become involved in the effort to help others get

off the sinking ship as well? God wants us not only to focus on ourselves and our salvation, but also to help others—to assist those whom He is drawing out of this world. We are to be a "light of the world," shining in the darkness, giving light and hope to those who are willing to see it (Matthew 5:14).

That is what the Work of God is doing today. God's Kingdom is not yet established on the earth—we will be part of that cause when Christ returns. The cause right now is the work of announcing and preparing the world for the establishment of that Kingdom of God. We are a part of the Work that Christ is doing in saving those who hear the message, respond, and repent. We also live as a witness to God's way, truth, and power.

What cause could be more important?

### Motivated for a Cause

Today, more and more people are filled with political zeal to support some cause or another, because they see that as crucial to the survival of their group or their nation. They see their causes as requiring dedication, commitment, and sustained effort.

What about us? Are we as zealous for God's Work as some people are for carnal political causes? When Jesus was on this earth, He was motivated to get His job done. It's what drove Him and gave His life meaning and purpose. He explained it this way: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34).

Jesus' attitude was not to wait around or be lazy—He was focused on doing God's Work and doing it right away, with no delay. He made this focus plain to His disciples when He said, "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (v. 35).

He also explained that no one lives or works alone and in a vacuum. We all walk a path that has been trod by others before us. In terms of the Work, He explained it this way: "For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors" (vv. 37–38). Like so many of you, I have personally benefited from the many faithful members of God's Church who committed themselves to God's Work under Mr. Herbert Armstrong back in the 1930s and 1940s. My parents were called as a result of those Church members' zealous and faithful support of Mr. Armstrong's powerful ministry.



What about you? When did you become aware of the truth? Who labored to make it possible for you to learn the truth? These are important questions to ask as we commit ourselves to making that same truth available to others.

With God's help, we will accomplish His Work and fulfill His will for us. We have much to do and more people to reach! The Church itself is constituted to do the Work; it is here to announce the coming of the Kingdom of God and to prepare the world for it.

So, what are specific ways we can get more involved in the cause of preaching the Gospel and preparing the world for Jesus Christ's return?

### **Watch and Pray**

We are commanded to “watch” as the end of the age approaches. It's vital that we watch world events and stay in tune with what's happening on the world scene. Whether that's through the newspaper, radio, television, or Internet, we should stay up to date. Dr. Roderick C. Meredith personally set that example for decades, often bringing up news events in his classes and sermons.

But how do we make sure we are properly understanding those world events, and not just getting caught in the swirl of the news cycle? How do we avoid falling into a particular political slant because that's the news source we feed on? We know that many news outlets today are extremely biased and have a particular political agenda to sell.

Luke 21 has the answer. After warning His disciples to beware against “carousing, drunkenness, and the cares of this life” (v. 34), Jesus said, “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (v. 36).

How do we stay balanced in our approach to the news we ingest? We not only spend time keeping up with the headlines, but, more importantly, we spend time in prayer, talking to God. When we talk with Him about what's going on, we are reminded about what *He* is doing behind the scenes. We ponder the prophecies that He is working out. We ask Him to guide the efforts of the Work to reach more people who are without hope and looking for answers. And we are greatly encouraged when we consider how He *is* calling people now, and that, in fact, every human being will eventually be called. He is working out a great plan, and His Kingdom will replace all kingdoms to bring lasting peace to a troubled world.

It's worthwhile to consider the proportion of our watching to our praying. If we spend hours with the news but only minutes in prayer, perhaps we need to reevaluate how we spend our time.

### **Support the Cause Financially**

It matters that we support the Work of God with our wallet as well as our words. As Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:19–20).

God will provide for the Work—He says that all the gold and all the silver is His. But He provides through people. Our Father is not limited in resources, and it is to *our* benefit to put our heart into His Work. He could even raise up stones to do that Work (Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8), but He has chosen to give us the privilege of playing a part. We are blessed for and experience the joy of being part of His Work, and He takes care of us. Putting our hearts in the Work involves faithfully tithing and giving offerings.

### **Support the Local Chapter of the Cause**

All around the world, members of the Living Church of God are united in support of this cause. Members support Headquarters, and they also help in supporting the local ministry. They help support local Sabbath services. They bolster and encourage one another. Some deliver telecast tapes to broadcast stations and help at live *Tomorrow's World* Presentation events. Many share YouTube telecasts, Viewpoint videos, whiteboard videos, articles, or sermons on social media. One way or another, they are directly involved in supporting the Work!

We need to think about what we can do on a personal level in our interactions with outsiders, in our neighborhoods, on the job, and in the community. Historically, many of our brethren have been called through personal contacts or family members. We must not be afraid of shining as lights, convicted so others can see who we are and what we stand for.

This does not detract from our support for the weekly *Tomorrow's World* telecast, the *Tomorrow's World* magazine, the many aspects of our Internet outreach, and other media efforts. In this world, mass media efforts are extremely effective—easily the most effective way to get a message in front of the most people. God is opening new doors for us to do just that.

Yet our individual contribution at the local level is also vital. Just as with any cause in the world, support at the local level—a good “ground game”—is crucial. Notice what Paul wrote about the importance of each member to the function of the body: “For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Romans 12:3–5).

**WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE?** continues on page 21





# Twelve Truths About the True Gospel

By Wyatt Ciesielka

**W**hat is the true Gospel? Misunderstood or rejected by most of professing Christianity, the answer is in one respect simple and fundamental—yet, when more deeply explored, it is also richer and more profound than some may realize. This is precious knowledge that God expects faithful Christians to not only understand, but also be convicted of, be excited about, deeply appreciate, and be able to defend.

To the people God has called, this topic is hardly a new one, and it is also much bigger than what can be covered in one brief article. Yet this wonderful knowledge is not only fundamental to true Christianity; it should also be the Work that Jesus Christ's followers are zealously involved in studying, praying about, and supporting every day of their lives. Speaking of His zeal to teach and preach the true Gospel, Jesus told His disciples, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (John 4:34). Prophesying that His faithful disciples would continue to labor in this great Work up to the end of the age, Jesus proclaimed that the "gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). The end has not yet come, and that mission continues today.

The world rejects and ridicules the reality of this message, and even some of God's people appreciate it only superficially or are not as excited about it as they should be. Some let the cares of this world distract them from this incredible calling. But as Mr. Richard Ames has written, "It is those individuals *who have their heart in God's Work* in fulfilling the Great Commission, whom God will preserve from the Great Tribulation that Jesus prophesied in Matthew 24:21–22" ("Is Your Heart in the 'Work'?", *Tomorrow's World*, September–October 2015).

How much are *our* hearts in this great Work? How much is it our *food*? Jesus Christ was totally committed to this Work. How much are *we* convicted of the truth of the Gospel? How deeply do *we* understand and appreciate this precious knowledge? Jesus Christ perfectly understood the true Gospel and all its implications.

## Taught From the Very Beginning

The true Gospel was proclaimed from the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. He was the Lamb who would take away the sin of the world and the Messiah who will establish an actual Kingdom of God on this earth. Upon its arrival, true Christians will attain immortality in God's Family and Satan will be removed as the god of this age. This is what the Old Testament prophecies foretold (cf. Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 9:6–7; Daniel 7:13–14), what John the Baptist preached, and what Jesus Christ taught from the very start of His ministry.

Notice that the New Testament records John the Baptist's introduction of Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Immediately after His baptism, Jesus resisted Satan in the wilderness for 40 days (Mark 1:9–13), and immediately after overcoming Satan, Jesus returned to Galilee to begin His earthly ministry. And what is the *first* preserved message from Jesus Christ's earthly ministry? Mark 1:14–15 records, "Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, *preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God*, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

However, as we review in this article *twelve truths about the Gospel*, we will see that Satan has attacked this precious truth from the beginning. Consequently, most ignore, neglect, misunderstand, or simply reject this message—but this should not be so. Reminding us of how *essential* this precious knowledge is to each of us, the late Dr. Roderick C. Meredith proclaimed that "the most *vital knowledge* concerns this coming, world-ruling government. That is why Jesus Himself constantly preached this message" ("The Most Vital Knowledge of All!," *Tomorrow's World*, October–December, 1999). This is why, from 31 AD to today, not only has God's faithful Church focused on preaching the true Gospel, but His ministers have also addressed the *errors* that many wrongly believe regarding the Gospel message. For example, in *Tomorrow's World* telecasts and magazine articles, Mr. Gerald E. Weston has asked "Why Neglect the Gospel?" (*TomorrowsWorld.org*, January 8, 2020) and has warned that professing Christianity preaches a "different gospel" ("Live the Way!," *Tomorrow's World*, May–June, 2017).

## The Greatest Hope, Based on the Greatest Love

But *why* the Gospel in the first place? The answer to that question reveals our *first* truth about the true Gospel: It reveals a plan based on God's love.

God's nature is one of love (1 John 4:8, 16), and He ever governs in love. While the decision of God the Father and the preincarnate Word that Jesus Christ would become the sacrifice for the sins of the world is the greatest demonstration of love, the true Gospel message is based on God's nature of outgoing love. As John 3:16 reveals, God's love is so great that His desire is that all will, one day, become members of His glorious family. To accomplish this plan, Jesus Christ has become "the firstborn from the dead" (Revelation 1:5; Colossians 1:15) and He will be "the firstborn *among many brethren*" (Romans 8:29). This is the glorious hope of faithful Christians—the promise that God is building a future, divine family. This plan and coming reality is based on His nature of unfathomably deep love. Peter said that "through these [great and precious promises] you may be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).

1 Corinthians 15:51–53, John 3:16, and many other passages make God's purpose clear. Because of His nature of magnificent *love*, God's desire is to make *eternal life* available to many through Jesus Christ His Son (John 10:27–29; 17:1–3). "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28). Christ was the Lamb who came to take away sin from the world. True Christians who overcome, who repent of sin and practice righteousness—those who "do His commandments" (Revelation 22:14)—have that hope of salvation and immortality at His return.

Our first truth about the true Gospel is that because of the God Family's love for us, Jesus makes "propitiation for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the whole world" (1 John 2:2). And, as we will see, because of God's nature of outgoing love, these precious promises are not only for those whom God has called now, but also for every person who has ever lived or will live!

## A Literal Message

Probably the most familiar truth, our *second* truth, as summarized in the Living Church of God's *Official Statement of Fundamental Beliefs*, is simply that the true Gospel is *the good news* about the coming Kingdom of God and the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus Christ's sacrifice.

This is not a "metaphor." The Kingdom of God is not in our hearts or "located in man's inner being," as Origen, one of the most influential early "Christian" theologians, wrongly taught. This notion was accepted by the Roman Catholic Church and adopted by the general Protestant world, which

believes that the Kingdom of God will be fulfilled by the spread of professing Christianity, despite all its competing sects and denominations.

The true Gospel, however, reveals something much more awesome than a feeling in our hearts or the wayward organizations of men. It points to that great, *future* event when Jesus Christ will *literally* return. At that time, His elect saints will rise to meet Him and be changed from corruptible flesh to incorruptible spirit (1 Corinthians 15:51–53; Revelation 20:6). The true Gospel proclaims the glorious return of Jesus Christ to *literally* establish the Kingdom of God on this earth (cf. Titus 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:14–18).

This leads to our *third* truth, which is that the current "god of this age," Satan the devil, *hates* this message. From the beginning, he has fought it, corrupted it, and blinded the world to it (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4). As Dr. Douglas Winnail has written, "Contrary to what many believe and teach today, the true gospel proclaimed by Jesus and His Apostles was corrupted in the early centuries after Christ, replaced by a false gospel that today passes for 'mainstream Christianity'" ("The True Gospel Proclaimed!," *Tomorrow's World*, May–June, 2011). How could this be? The Bible reveals that Satan is currently the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). While God is, of course, supreme, the Bible is very clear that the kingdoms of this world do not *yet* belong to Jesus Christ (cf. John 18:36). Satan hates this message that portends his removal from power, and he has fought and attacked it relentlessly. It is no wonder that Satan has always worked to corrupt the Gospel (Galatians 1:6), causing most of professing Christianity to ignore or reject it—but God's true saints will understand, appreciate, and hold on to the truth of the true Gospel.

Our *fourth* truth is that this coming Kingdom will be a *real* kingdom. Any real kingdom contains four elements: a ruler, territory, laws, and subjects. Christ will be the Kingdom's Ruler, the entire earth will be the Kingdom's territory, God's laws will be the Kingdom's laws, and all of humanity will be the Kingdom's subjects. We see these four elements detailed in *many* passages of the Bible. For example, Isaiah 2:2–3 refers to the government as "the mountain of the LORD's house," and the "nations" and "people" who go up to it to learn and to worship are the subjects. God's law will go out from Jerusalem, and the God of Jacob will rule supreme. Additional passages such as Isaiah 11:6–9, 14:7; Amos 9:14–15; Micah 4; Zechariah 8:20–23; Malachi 4, and many others bring out these same four elements.

Acts 3:19–21 refers to the coming Kingdom of God as the "times of refreshing," and Scripture makes it very clear that the resurrected saints will *literally* rule under Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 5:10, 20:4). Today, true saints are citizens of that Kingdom—subject to and conformed to God's

laws (Philippians 3:20)—but all humanity will eventually become subjects of God’s government at the Second Coming. At that time, as God’s Church has always understood, all peoples and nations of the earth will learn to live according to God’s laws and be ruled by the King of kings and the resurrected firstfruits—in a real, literal way.

During that future time, those physical people will not yet be members of God’s divine *spirit family*, but all these people will then have the opportunity to learn and live by

The current “god of this age,” Satan the devil, hates this message. **From the beginning, he has fought it, corrupted it, and blinded the world to it.**

God’s law. As Mr. Richard Ames has written, “The subjects of the Kingdom will be the human beings who survive into the Millennium—living and learning in a world transformed!” (*What Happens When You Die?*, p. 31). The Kingdom of God will be a *real* kingdom. What a wonderful hope and promise!

### A Message for All People

Our *fifth* truth is that it is *only* through Jesus Christ that we may receive salvation and eternal life. The true Gospel shows the way to immortality (2 Timothy 1:10). Salvation and eternal life come by no other, and “there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12; 8:12).

That Jesus Christ is the author and finisher of this hope (Hebrews 5:9; 12:2) leads us to our *sixth* truth, which is that this is a message we can trust—because we can trust the Messenger (cf. Ephesians 1:13).

This then leads to our *seventh* truth, which is that we should not be ashamed of this message and this hope, because “it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). In an ecumenical and agnostic world, it may not sound “politically correct” to say that salvation is only through Jesus Christ, but true Christianity has never been “politically correct.” As we know, the Apostles were often beaten for “preaching Jesus as the Christ” (Acts 5:40–42) and some early New Testament Christians were even martyred for their belief in the true Gospel.

Our *eighth* truth is that while eternal life is a gift, the saints will be rewarded according to their works. The parable of the nobleman and the minas illustrates this (cf. Luke 19:11–27). As Mr. Weston summarized in the January–February 2020 *Tomorrow’s World*, “We are *saved* by faith (Ephesians 2:8), but *rewarded* according to our works: ‘And behold,

I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work’ (Revelation 22:12).”

This leads to our *ninth* truth, which is that the true Gospel is also a message of repentance. From the Old Testament prophecies warning the nations to repent (cf. Ezekiel 33), to John the Baptist’s proclamation (cf. Matthew 3:1–2), to Jesus’ message from His earliest ministry (Mark 1:14–15), this exciting “good news” proclamation has always included a strong call for individual, personal, and national repentance.

The need to repent of sin and faithfully turn to God has been and will continue to be proclaimed by God’s faithful Church until the end of this age and the return of the conquering Christ (Matthew 24:14). The message of repentance will climax when Christ returns as the King of kings, and will, “with [a sharp sword]... strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron” (Revelation 19:15). God is loving, but He requires repentance from wickedness. He will correct in order to produce change. As Scripture says, godly correction produces godly sorrow, which produces repentance leading to salvation (2 Corinthians 7:9–10). This is God’s desire for us individually and eventually for the entire world.

Zeal for this precious knowledge, and a dedication to proclaiming this message of repentance and hope to the entire world, are characteristics of end-time Philadelphian Christians, who will strive to go through the “open door” that God has given them (Revelation 3:8). In biblical symbolism an “open door” is often synonymous with preaching the Gospel (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3). That Philadelphian Christians will be especially zealous to support the proclamation of the true Gospel is, then, our *tenth* truth. Jesus Christ identifies this persevering commitment as a distinguishing feature of a Philadelphian Christian in whom He is pleased and whom He will protect from “the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world” (Revelation 3:10).

Our *eleventh* truth is that this exciting message will be preached to the entire world before the end of this age, as we have already seen from Matthew 24:14 and elsewhere.

Again, other aspects could be given, but the *twelfth* truth in this list is that the true Gospel represents a plan for *all* people. This twelfth truth is a consequence of our first truth—that God’s nature and character is of immense love. God loved the whole world so much that He gave His only begotten Son—and for what purpose? God desires to give everlasting life to *all* who believe in Him (John 3:16), and there is *no* favoritism with God (Romans 2:11). Salvation will be available to all—regardless of nationality or ethnicity, all will become “a

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# Pre-Engagement Counseling: Benefits Worth Seeking



By **Scott D. Winnail**

**W**hy should two people who are in love and desiring to be married seek counsel from a minister? Why would two mature and even converted adults *need* counseling before marriage? And why should they seek this counseling even before they become engaged? This article will answer these very important questions and more.

Marriage is one of the most exciting, meaningful, and sought-after stages of life. Most children grow up with the desire and expectation that one day they will marry and have their own family. Marriage is also a divine institution ordained by God for men and women. God directed that “a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

But how do we go from the state of being single to being married? Any couple can marry, right? Although it is true that anyone can get married within the bounds of the law, forming a successful and lasting *God-centered* marriage is not automatic or a matter of chance. Successful marriages are planned, built, and constantly worked at!

Just as few people would embark on a chosen career without seeking the proper training and education, marriage should not be entered into lightly or without substantial planning and preparation. As Christ admonished in Luke 14:28, we should be sure to “count the cost” before making major life decisions. After all, marriage is one of the most important decisions a man or woman can make in life—second only to baptism!

Engagement is a commitment or a promise to be married. When a man and a woman become engaged, they are promising to marry each other in the relatively near future. Engagement should never be entered into lightly, and under normal circumstances should not be terminated unless it becomes clear to one or both individuals that they should not marry each other.

Because of this, a couple should be as certain as they can be about their future together before becoming engaged. It *should* mean that a man and woman have taken their time—proceeding carefully, methodically, and lovingly in gaining answers to their many deep questions, each coming

to understand the character of the future mate. It *should* mean that they have sought out wise and loving counsel from trusted advisors—parents and grandparents, faithful friends, and the ministry of the Church—and have demonstrated and confirmed their love for and commitment to each other.

## **The Value of Counsel Before Marriage**

God’s people are well aware of the biblical admonitions to seek counsel before making important decisions. Jesus Christ taught the principle that we should *ask, seek, and knock* (Matthew 7:7). King Solomon taught that the wise will seek counsel. In fact, there is even “safety” when we seek counsel (Proverbs 11:14). Why? Because if we are limited to our own reasoning, especially if we follow our *heart* without wise counsel, we can be deceived and take the wrong path (Jeremiah 17:9).

When it comes to pre-engagement counseling, many wise couples ask good questions. However, the help of a converted minister can greatly benefit the couple seeking to become married. Wisdom “raises her voice in the open squares” (Proverbs 1:20) and wise couples will seek it—especially before becoming engaged.

Seeking formal counseling before marriage is actually “one of the best proactive steps that you can take in order to safeguard your union” (“5 Benefits of Pre-Marriage Counseling,” *Marriage.com*, September 23, 2019). And according to longtime psychologist Dr. Seth Myers, “Pre-marital counseling is the smartest decision that any couple can make.... No matter how cohesive a couple may be, problems and differences will inevitably arise, so pre-marital counseling really functions like the best insurance policy a couple could ever purchase” (“Benefits of Pre-Marital Counseling: Successful Marriage,” *Psychology Today*, September 21, 2011).

One study actually found that couples “who underwent counseling before their wedding had a 30% higher marital success rate than those who did not” (“20 Significant Pre-marital Counseling Statistics,” *HealthResearchFunding.org*). The *Marriage.com* article mentioned before highlights five important benefits of pre-marriage counseling that are worth discussing. We have added commentary to each point.

1. **“You’ll see your relationship from ‘the outside in.’”** Humanly, we each see ourselves from our own perspective. Involving one of God’s ministers as an outside counselor brings in a neutral and godly outside perspective.
2. **“It gives you a chance to think past your emotions.”** Couples who want to be married *are* dealing with powerful emotions, no matter how hard they try to be rational. Seeking counsel can help a couple see their relationship from both a logical and a spiritual perspective.
3. **“Reasons for getting married” can be discussed.** Seeking counsel can help ensure that a broad array of reasons for marriage are considered, not just the ones the couple are familiar with.
4. **“Uncomfortable topics” can be covered.** No one likes to talk about private matters, but these matters must be addressed if the couple are to achieve openness, full disclosure, and trust. Although the couple do not need to disclose personal information to the counseling minister, the minister can encourage them to discuss together several very important topics that may very well be overlooked or omitted.
5. **“The counselor provides an unbiased opinion” or perspective.** God’s ministers want couples to be happy and marriages to be successful. They are on the side of both the man and the woman and are much more able to look at the relationship in an unbiased way.

In addition to the benefits just mentioned, the counseling minister will help ensure that the couple deeply understand the spiritual purposes of marriage and the implications of their marriage covenant together. Also, the minister will help



couples recognize tactics that our adversary, Satan the devil, uses to try to destroy marriages, and will help the couple understand how to develop the skills necessary to defend against Satan’s attacks.

### **How Does Pre-Engagement Counseling Work?**

Once a man and a woman have gotten to know each other well, have begun dating with the intent to determine if their relationship is bound for marriage, and are fairly certain that marriage is a likely outcome of their relationship, pre-engagement counseling is a very wise idea.

As a tool to help a couple determine more clearly and conclusively the potential future success of a marriage, pre-engagement counseling is designed to assist the couple in getting to know each other on a deeper level and in a more systematic way. It can help a couple examine multiple elements of their relationship, many of which may be overlooked without the experienced direction of a counseling minister. Ultimately, pre-engagement counseling is designed to help a couple build the most solid mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual foundation they possibly can develop together for their future marriage.

Pre-engagement counseling should give a couple a very high degree of confidence in the potential success of their future marriage. They should see God’s hand clearly in their relationship, and they should be able to largely eliminate doubts about the success of their future marriage.

Like baptismal counseling, pre-engagement counseling is a process, not an event. In most situations, couples meet with a minister multiple times throughout the counseling process. Between meetings, the couple may be encouraged to read and discuss material related to marriage and relationships. In addition, the couple may be encouraged to complete worksheets or activities to facilitate deeper communication. These activities may involve exploring goals for marriage, expected roles for husband and wife, common mistakes made in marriage, financial planning, family planning, and more.

In addition to the tasks just mentioned, many couples complete a pre-marriage questionnaire like the Prepare/Enrich inventory. These tools can highlight areas of strength in the couple’s relationship and areas of possible weakness—areas where more skills can be developed to prevent future difficulties.

### **Why Not Seek Counsel Before Engagement?**

To some, seeking counseling before engagement may seem premature. After all, if you are not yet engaged, how do you know you really want to get married? That question is really at the heart of the matter. How can an individual or a couple

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# Digging Deeper: Why Did Jesus Stop at a Comma?

By **Kenneth Frank**

If you have read the account of Jesus' visit to a synagogue in which He read aloud from a passage in Isaiah, have you noticed that He stopped His reading right in the middle of a verse—at a comma? This was a most unusual preaching strategy, but it was deliberate. Jesus was recognized as a member of His Nazareth synagogue and was invited according to first-century Jewish custom to read a portion of either the Law or the Prophets. He may have deliberately chosen the scroll of Isaiah for this sermon to His fellow worshippers. However, what He read and pointedly commented upon caused them to rise up and threaten His life. Luke alone records this incident, in Luke 4:16–30.

Jesus quoted two passages from Isaiah that He was beginning to fulfill: Isaiah 61:1–2 and Isaiah 58:6. Combining two texts with a similar theme was a common practice called a *gezerah shava*. If you read Isaiah's original version, you will notice some rewording of the text in Luke's account. This is common throughout our New Testament—God, the Author and Supreme Editor of the Bible, is at liberty to revise and rephrase His word as necessary, depending on the context in which it is cited.

## **Jesus First Came as a Prophet**

When Jesus proclaimed that the Spirit was upon Him, He meant that He was moved to do some supernatural work. In Luke 4:18, He explained that He was anointed by the Spirit, as Luke later explained in Acts 10:38. The Old Testament ceremony of anointing with oil inaugurated men into the offices of priest, prophet, or king. Jesus first came as the Prophet (Matthew 21:11; John 7:40), today He is our High Priest in heaven (Hebrews 4:14–15), and He will return as our King (Revelation 11:15; 17:14). He holds all three offices at once.

Jesus explained that this anointing enabled Him to preach the Gospel to the poor, and Luke emphasized Jesus' concern for those materially poor, who were often at the mercy of unscrupulous officials and businessmen. It was generally thought that their suffering was due to a curse from God and was their fault. By contrast, those who relieved the poor were considered especially righteous since almsgiving

was synonymous with righteousness in the minds of many at the time.

Jesus then proclaimed that He was sent to heal the brokenhearted—those who were in despair of heart, including those whose mourning over their sins leads to repentance. He continued His sermon, stating that He came to preach deliverance to the captives—i.e., the forgiveness of sin and remission of its penalty. Jesus will deliver those who are held in Satan's snare as his captives in body, mind, or spirit.

Jesus added that He had come to recover sight to the blind, including those spiritually blind to God's truth. During His ministry, Jesus healed many who were physically blind. He next declared that He came to liberate the bruised—i.e., oppressed, broken people. Jesus came to free people from heavy burdens of sin and oppressive rabbinical restrictions.

Jesus knew what it was like to be poor, brokenhearted, and bruised (Isaiah 53:3–5). The phrase “to set at liberty those who are oppressed” in Luke 4:18 was Jesus' insertion of a paraphrase from Isaiah 58:6. He was announcing a time when salvation was available to His audiences. The final phrase of Isaiah 61:2 states that, throughout His ministry, He came to comfort all who mourn over loss or sin. He still does today!

## **Stopping at a Comma**

In Luke 4:19, Jesus quoted only part of Isaiah 61:2. Notice the complete verse: “to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn” (Isaiah 61:2). The “acceptable year of the LORD” sometimes refers to the Jubilee year of Leviticus 25:8–17. However, Jesus applied it to His own ministry. He offered liberation from sin and its consequences. Those who accepted His offer of salvation became His disciples.

As He quoted Isaiah 61:2, He omitted what comes after the first comma in most English-language Bibles, leaving out “the day of vengeance of our God” (cf. Luke 4:19). He seemed to imply that the day of God's vengeance is reserved for His Second Coming when He returns as conquering King and administers vengeance—justice—on those who willfully oppose Him.

Many Jews at the time believed that their salvation was a matter of nationality rather than submission to God. They

considered God's vengeance and retribution to be reserved for the Gentiles. Some Jewish sects believed that the Messiah would arrive as a powerful, conquering prince at the head of a mighty army to vanquish the Jews' enemies. When Jesus came instead as a suffering Servant Messiah who died for human sin, they rejected Him because He did not meet their Messianic expectations. Their pride, prejudice, and preconceived opinion blinded them to their spiritual need for repentance. What follows in this story is the result of this attitude.

### Scripture Fulfilled in a Man from Nazareth

In Luke 4:20, Jesus ended His reading, rolled up the scroll of Isaiah, and handed it back so He could sit down to deliver a sermon about these passages. The eyes of the congregation were fixed upon Him. Suspense and tension grew as people wondered what He would say next. He proclaimed that these texts were being fulfilled in their hearing (Luke 4:21). His listeners, however, expected these passages to be fulfilled in a coming Messianic age. Jesus told them that this phase of His ministry had already begun and that they were being given an offer of repentance and discipleship.

The audience wondered at such words coming from one they had known since His boyhood. They asked, "Is this not Joseph's son?" (Luke 4:22). *How could He be the Messiah?* Jesus foretold in Luke 4:23 that, rather than respond favorably to His offer, they would recite to Him a proverb that questions a person's power and authority: "Physician, heal yourself!"

Instead of responding to His offer, they wanted Him to perform a miracle—they had probably heard about miracles He performed during His earlier ministry in Judea and Capernaum. By this point, Jesus had already turned water into wine and healed a nobleman's son. Out of mere curiosity, they wanted to see a miracle—but not to transform their lives through genuine spiritual responsiveness.



Ruins of an ancient Jewish synagogue in the Golan Heights

### Not Accepted at Home

Jesus then explained that prophets are seldom fully trusted at home (Luke 4:24). Jesus recited a proverbial expression that placed Him in the long line of prophets whose people rejected them. In Jesus' case, his neighbors rejected Him for noting the examples of Elijah and Elisha, Old Testament prophets who performed miracles for Gentiles during an age of Israelite apostasy (Luke 4:25–27).

This was more than His audience could stand, so they arose in wrath (Luke 4:28). Their rage had been building as they had sat listening to Him, but now it boiled over. They were not slow to see how Jesus applied these Old Testament stories to them—He revealed that they were just as apostate as the Israelites in the time of Elijah and Elisha. Instead of accepting the message to repent of their sins, they chose to attack the Messenger. Familiarity had bred contempt for one of their own.

They were unwilling to humble their hearts. Their fierce, nationalistic pride and bigotry resented the thought of God having blessed Gentiles in the time of Elijah and Elisha. In effect, Jesus had compared His townsfolk to their unbelieving ancestors. Jesus even gave them another opportunity about a year later, but instead of taking it, they were offended by Him. As a result, He did not work many miracles in His hometown (Matthew 13:53–58; Mark 6:5). At the time, "even His brothers did not believe in Him" (John 7:5).

In Luke 4:29, these congregants led Him to the top of a hill overlooking Nazareth, intending to cast Him down headfirst and then stone Him to death for blasphemy. This was contrary to Jewish custom that prohibited execution without trial and forbade it being conducted on the Sabbath. Not only that, but Roman law required them to have the governor's permission before executing one of their own. They were acting like a lynch mob.

But in Luke 4:30–32, Jesus miraculously passed through their midst and continued His ministry in Capernaum; His time of sacrificial death had not yet come (John 7:30). Many elsewhere became His disciples. Jesus lived this proverbial expression: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house" (Matthew 13:57).

What about us? Do we allow familiarity to breed contempt when we interact with those God has chosen? Are we resentful of the opportunities God gives to those around us? Do we look down upon those outside of God's Church and belittle them, simply because God has not yet called them to understanding? Let's examine the ways we consider and treat others, learn from the example of our Savior, and continue to grow in His grace and knowledge. (L)

**Editor's Note:** *The above article has been adapted for the Living Church News from one of the many informative Digging Deeper essays available at [LCGEducation.org](http://LCGEducation.org). We hope it has interested you in digging deeper into what Living Education has to offer!*

# Business Operations: An Interview with Mr. Dexter Wakefield

By Editorial Staff

*A longtime pillar of God's Church, Mr. Dexter Wakefield currently serves as LCG's Director of Business Operations. We sat down with him to talk about what it's like to direct one of the largest divisions of the Headquarters team.*

## **How were you called into God's Church, and how did you then come to direct LCG's Business Operations?**

"I was first in commercial real estate finance and lending, vice president of a major real estate investment trust. That was early in the 1970s. After that, I was in commercial mortgage brokerage, financing condominiums, high-rises, office buildings, shopping centers, hotels—and with a development of my own on the side.

"I heard the radio broadcast late one evening, driving along in my car, and then decided I would get the *Plain Truth* magazine. That was in 1974. And the next morning, I woke up and couldn't get the phone number out of my head—I still remember it to this day. In any case, I called and started getting the magazine, and then more things—and by 1976, I was baptized.

"I ran my own business in South Florida for over 25 years, during which I became an elder in the Church in 1988. After Worldwide, I was an elder with the Global Church of God, then later an elder with the Living Church of God, and subsequently was brought on full-time for about three years as an area pastor. So, I just closed my company up, and then Dr. Meredith asked me if I would come up to Charlotte and serve Business Operations."

## **How would you describe the support Business Operations provides to God's Work?**

"I would say, a very important part—maybe the most important part—is managing fulfillment.

"Outreach is handled by the Television and Digital Media Department and the Editorial Department—but then the calls come in on 1-800 numbers, letters, and everything else.

"All these things come in, and they have to be processed. They have to be processed first through the call centers—and I serve those areas—then processed through Records & Information Services and entered into the database. And then



we have to have the magazines and the booklets printed, and then [send the requests] to the folks in the Mail Processing Department, and they ship it all out.

"And after that, the field ministry handles the people who call and want [a visit]. Those are the three major divisions. So, the fulfillment aspect of it is what we work with, what we manage.

"Of course, we support the field ministry, too, and one of the most important ways is financially. That has to do with their salaries, their insurance, their automobile and travel expenses, local hall payments or hall contracts—all of those things are different areas that we serve here. We support the field ministers as they feed the flock.

"Things change very fast, so we are constantly changing and adjusting to the new technologies, the new situations in the field with the media and other things. One of the things we've done over the years is automate a number of administrative functions, mostly in Accounting and in Legal Affairs & Risk Management. That enables us to have fewer people doing more work and to be a lot more productive. Also, I think the websites are far better than they used to be—they're doing a great job on that, and we're constantly upgrading our digital infrastructure, too. All of this is just an ongoing process that we're engaged in constantly."

## **What is one of the challenges involved with directing Business Operations?**

"One of the most difficult things is simply keeping up with the pace of change, mostly in our media environment and our technological environment—there's a constant effort to do that. And, thinking about it, one of the things that has been the most difficult for me and for some of the rest of us in fulfillment has been some of the international fulfillment, particularly in Central and South America. In many areas there, the postal services just don't work, or they work very poorly.



There are problems with corruption and problems with the post offices—mail systems just don't work well, and they have gotten much worse with COVID-19.

"So, with a number of countries, we can't use the postal systems at all. But the Spanish-speaking leadership is working very hard—they've got a bunch of new ideas that they're putting into effect. We're trying to help as much as we can with a new, very aggressive program to try to get more things to people digitally, such as *El Mundo de Mañana*—instead of sending them the hard copies, which we haven't been able to send to many countries for years."

### What do you find most rewarding about directing Business Operations?

"I think it's really rewarding to just watch everybody work together. Having been in the corporate world, there are lines of authority—and we do have them here, but people work across them very well, and the main reason is that they all have a common goal and purpose, which is preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and feeding the flock. Everyone here is focused on doing that. So, watching our people work together and enabling that is very rewarding for me. There's a common goal and a common vision, and you just don't have that in the corporate world." <sup>(LH)</sup>

## Living Education Graduation 2021

Wrapping up its third year of operation, Living Education—Charlotte held its graduation ceremony this year on May 14 at the Waxhaw Women's Club in downtown Waxhaw, North Carolina. Inside this brick-and-mortar, "old town" setting, the program's many participants gathered to celebrate the accomplishments of this year's twelve graduates.

After a year of ups and downs, replete with field trips, forums and assemblies, learning (and teaching) opportunities, student-hosted meals, and exhaustive hard work and studying, faculty and students alike were happy to meet together to cap off the academic year with formality and fellowship. They were also able to hear four encouraging messages from guest speakers and three evangelists in the Church.

Mr. Kenneth Frank listed all the courses the students had worked through and gave a short summary of each, followed by an address in which Dr. Douglas Winnail asked the graduates to think about what they will take away from the Living Education program and challenged them to use it as a springboard for the rest of their lives. Mr. Richard Ames then spoke about the history of education in the Church and its meaning in the Church today, especially pertaining to the graduates. Finally, Mr. Gerald E. Weston's address focused on the idea of being a light and good exam-



**Top row:** Nathan Morgan, Nia Morgan, DaQuan Rucker, Marc Figueroa, German Roldan, Jr.

**Middle row:** Harmony Talbott, Juliette McNair, Nicholas Palmer, Spencer Sena

**Bottom row:** Meredith Hodges, Jenitza Pirela-Mariani, Rylyn Mooney

ple to others, and he urged the graduates to use what they have learned about God's culture at Living Education—Charlotte to continue to follow and spread that culture wherever life takes them.

After the ceremony and a complimentary brisket lunch, family members and guests were able to spend time sharing their loved ones' experiences wrapping up the program, looking forward to all that lies ahead.

The graduating students this year are **Marc Figueroa, Meredith Hodges, Juliette McNair, Rylyn Mooney, Na-**

**than Morgan, Nia Morgan, Nicholas Palmer, Jenitza Pirela-Mariani, German Roldan, Jr., DaQuan Rucker, Spencer Sena, and Harmony Talbott.** Most of the graduates will be staying in Charlotte to either work at the Church Headquarters office or to pursue further schooling and career goals in the area. May God bless their every effort as they strive to "stay close to the trunk of the tree" and build futures founded on the fundamentals of God's word and His way of life.

—Editorial Staff

## Births

Mr. and Mrs. Lou (Alex) De Jager have a second son, **William Nathan**. He was born on March 16, weighing 8 pounds, 6 ounces, and measuring 21.25 inches long. The De Jagers attend the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

Mr. and Mrs. Darryl (Elva) Greene of the Grande Prairie, Alberta, congregation in Canada are delighted to announce the arrival of their fourth child, **Joshua Edward Greene**. He was born on March 29 weighing 9 pounds, 1 ounce, and measuring 19.5 inches long. His sister and two brothers welcomed him home with enthusiasm! Everyone is doing well.

Mr. and Mrs. Jake (Meagan) Hall welcomed their first child, a daughter, **Naomi Brooke**, on March 23. Naomi weighed 9 pounds, 3 ounces, and measured 21.75 inches long. The Hall family attends the Charlotte, North Carolina, congregation.

On December 1, Mr. and Mrs. Derek (Holly) McQuattie welcomed a baby girl to the family: **Abigail Louise Margaret**. Her two older brothers are excited to have a baby sister, and grandparents Shane and Lorraine Kruse are overjoyed at their first granddaughter. The McQuattie family attends the Mississauga, Ontario, congregation in Canada.

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## Weddings & Anniversaries

**Mr. Craig Woudstra** and **Ms. Rose Olson** are happy to announce their union in marriage on February 15 in a small private ceremony officiated by evangelist Stuart Wachowicz. The couple attend the Edmonton, Alberta, congregation in Canada.

**Mr. and Mrs. Edgar (Colette) Brown** celebrated their golden wedding anniversary on December 9. They were baptized together into God's Church in 1987, in the cow trough of their family farm in Jersey, Channel Islands. The congregation in Jersey had been established just six months earlier. Mr. and Mrs. Brown have been blessed with three children and five grandchildren. Congratulations to the Browns on this wonderful milestone of 50 years of marriage!

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## ORDINATIONS

**Mrs. Cindy R. Brignac** was ordained a deaconess on Pentecost by Area Pastor Glen Harrison and elders Curtis Lambright, Ray Joffrion, and Chip Wheelahan. Mrs. Brignac serves in the Lafayette, Louisiana, congregation.

**Mr. Anthony Collier** was ordained an elder on April 17 by Area Pastor Martin Fannin. Mr. Collier serves in the Knoxville, Tennessee, congregation.

Messrs. **David Crockett** and **Felipe Torres** were ordained elders on Pentecost by evangelist Douglas Winnail, Area Pastor Gary Stein, and elders Dale Bailey and Marshall Moluf. Mr. Crockett serves in the Big Sandy congregation, and Mr. Torres in the Dallas congregation, both in Texas.

**Mr. Alvin Cumberbatch** was ordained an elder on April 3 by Area Pastor Paul Shumway. Mr. Cumberbatch serves in the Christ Church, Barbados, congregation.

**Mr. Bruno Duval** was ordained a deacon on March 20 by Regional Director Stuart Wachowicz and Area Pastors Winston Gosse and Jacques Secours. Mr. Duval serves in the Montreal, Quebec, congregation in Canada.

**Mr. Percival Gloriani** was ordained an elder on March 6 by Area Pastor Rodger Bardo and elders Ed Sheret and Richard Sedliacik. Mr. Gloriani serves in the Orange County, California, congregation.

**Mr. Glen Harrison** of the Braselton, Georgia, congregation, was ordained a deacon on August 8, 2020, by Regional

Pastor Daniel Hall; Mr. Glen D. Harrison, area pastor in Louisiana and Glen's father; and elder Josh Lyons. Mr. Glen D. Harrison was delighted to visit the congregation and assist in the ordination of his son.

**Mr. Israel Mallett** was ordained a deacon on April 3 by Area Pastor Paul Shumway and elder Alvin Cumberbatch. Mr. Mallett serves in the Christ Church, Barbados, congregation.

**Mr. Innocent Ugwu** was ordained a deacon on March 6 by Area Pastor Rodger Bardo and elders Ed Sheret, Richard Sedliacik, and Percival Gloriani. Mr. Ugwu serves in the Orange County, California, congregation.

# In Loving Memory

**Mr. Thomas Arnold, 75**, died on April 21. Baptized in 1975, he was a member of God's Church for more than 45 years. He was a positive example despite suffering from various illnesses over the last two years of his life. Through the years, he practiced the way of giving and serving, not only in actions that were visible to many, but also in ways that no one but the recipients knew. He especially enjoyed church socials, and he and his wife Jonice, also a longtime member, sought out those who didn't have a dance partner to make sure they didn't feel left out at dances. Besides his wife, Mr. Arnold is survived by three sons and a daughter, four grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren. His kindness, humility, and good humor are also missed by the Jacksonville, North Carolina, congregation and all who knew him.

**Mr. Lloyd Dafoe, 90**, died on March 23. He was predeceased by his wife. Mr. Dafoe was a part of the Calgary, Alberta, congregation in Canada.

**Mrs. Margaret Dulaney, 84**, died at her home on February 16, at peace and eagerly awaiting the resurrection. She loved God's truth and was deeply committed to His way of life, and died just a few weeks short of the 60th anniversary of her baptism in 1961. Mrs. Dulaney was known for her kindness, gentleness, and ability to identify and meet the needs of others. She was a wonderful encourager, took pleasure in serving others, and served for many years as a deaconess. She loved music and wrote a number of biblical songs for children. Mrs. Dulaney was preceded in death by her husband, Gerald, a longtime minister, after more than 40 years of marriage. She is survived by three daughters, nine grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

**Mrs. Phyllis Gerfen, 84**, died at her home on February 16. A longtime member of God's Church, she and her husband Martin were baptized together in 1971. Declining health during the last few years prevented her from attending services with the Kansas City, Missouri, congregation of which she was a part. Mrs. Gerfen was predeceased by her husband and one daughter and is survived by another daughter, Susan Gerfen, also a member in the Kansas City congregation, and three grandchildren as well as her deceased daughter's husband. Kansas City pastor Rand Millich conducted her funeral.

**Mrs. Irma Leleux, 91**, died at her daughter's home in the Liège region of Belgium on December 5, 2020. Her husband, Émile, died in 1987 soon after they had both decided to attend services, but she attended faithfully from that time until the last few years, when her health did not permit it.

Mrs. Leleux had a sense of humor—which she used with kindness—and was gentle and affable, never criticizing others. She was not a complainer. Quiet, she never put herself forward but was there nonetheless—sensitive, attentive, willing to listen, and amiable. She will be greatly missed by those who knew her.

**Mrs. Christine Allgeyer McNair, 57**, died on May 27 after several months battling cancer. The daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Roger Allgeyer and wife of Pastor Jonathan McNair, she lived an active and wholehearted life, serving with her husband around the nation and around the world. Growing up in New York state, she excelled in sports as well as academics. At Ambassador College, she also participated in the Young Ambassadors musical group. She served at Church summer camps many times through the years. She married Mr. Jonathan McNair in 1988 and worked hard and happily, serving God's people any way she could. She was devoted to their five children and her whole family. All she did, she did with her might. Mrs. McNair is survived by her husband, two sons, three daughters, her mother, one brother, many other relatives, and countless friends. She will be greatly missed. In her own words to campers years ago, "Remember that when you say goodbye, you will have an eternity to do things together in the world tomorrow."

**Mr. Willie Lee Otholt, 80**, of the Temple, Texas, congregation, died on January 5 of complications of COVID-19. He and his wife Kay were baptized together into God's Church in 1971. Besides his wife, Mr. Otholt is survived by one son and one grandson. He will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved him.

**Mr. Kenneth Ernest Rock, 65**, died peacefully at his home on November 19, with his loving wife, Rita, by his side. Born in Ontario, Canada, he had been a member of God's Church since 1984. He took pleasure in serving others and sharing the Bible. Mr. Rock was a gifted speaker and vocalist and enjoyed music, travel, and the outdoors. He is survived by his wife (also a Church member), two sons, and one grandson, as well as many other family members. The Asheville, North Carolina, congregation and all who knew him will miss his friendly smile, positive attitude, and genuine kindness and love of people. Area Pastor Ron Poole and elder Stan Roper conducted his funeral service on November 23.

**Mr. Wallace Shears, 88**, died on March 18 with his family by his side. Baptized in 1970, he was a member of the Halifax, Nova Scotia, congregation in Canada. After he retired, he and

his wife Mildred traveled and attended many congregations as well as the Feast of Tabernacles in various locations. They spent five winters in Florida. He had a great sense of humor and loved music, gardening, and making pancakes for their grandchildren. A child at heart, he always had toys for the children at the Feast. Mr. Shears is survived by his wife, two children, four grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by one daughter. He will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved him.

**Mrs. Shirley Totts, 94**, died on March 25 in Westminster, Maryland. She was the last surviving of eight children, though she had not been expected to live to adulthood because of a heart condition. Her father's determination from the beginning and corrective heart surgery when she was in her twenties contributed to overcoming that prognosis. Growing up through the depression, she became a hard worker. She worked for an insurance company for many years and later started her own business cleaning offices and homes, which she did until her seventies. She outlived two husbands; her second, Owen, was also a member of God's Church. Mrs. Totts was baptized in 1972 and faithful to God's truth until her death. She primarily attended services in Baltimore, Maryland, and Jacksonville, Florida, and she was dearly loved. She had a servant's heart. She is survived by one daughter,

four grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren.

**Mrs. Maria Auxilio Urbina, 91**, died on May 12. Mrs. Urbina started attending the Winnipeg, Manitoba, congregation in Canada in January 2015 and was baptized in November of that year. She loved God's laws and ways and changed her life to please her Creator. She was an amazing example of warmth and caring. Though she spoke little English, she made it a point every Sabbath to personally greet everyone at services with her beautiful smile and hugs. Mrs. Urbina is survived by her husband, Carlos.

**Mr. Ernest Abraham Zaitoon, 92**, died peacefully at home on November 29, with his devoted wife, Heddy, by his side. Born in New Jersey, the son of Syrian immigrants, he was a veteran of the U.S. Army and retired after more than 30 years with the railroad. Mr. Zaitoon was baptized in April 1963 and was a faithful member of God's Church until his death. He is survived by his wife of 65 years, also a member; one brother; and one sister. Having lived in New Jersey for many years before retiring to North Carolina, Mr. and Mrs. Zaitoon had many friends there, too. Mr. Zaitoon will be remembered by all for his love of life, gracious hospitality, and heartfelt prayers. Elder Stan Roper conducted his funeral service on December 2.

### **FIGHT INDOCTRINATION** continued from page 2

ment is not from disease or violence—although those are real problems for some—but from the cultural influences in which they are immersed. There *is* a real spirit being who wants to destroy our children—and he is very skilled at destruction. His ultimate target is not liberalism or conservatism, but the Bible—for in it are the clarifying true values of life.

As the expression goes, “The man who will stand for nothing will fall for anything.” Dear brethren, we need to have strong, internalized values grounded in the word of God. We must walk circumspectly, with our eyes wide open. We need to recognize Satan's devices and understand how he influences and directs our culture.

We are in a battle for the hearts and minds of our children. No matter how intelligent and level-headed our young people may appear to be, they simply do not have the experience

their parents do—and they need you as a stabilizing anchor for God's truth. That truth, upon which all *real* truth is based, needs to be taught at every opportunity. “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:6–9).

Let us be sure to heed this admonition—for our children's sake!



**LIFE AFTER DEATH?** continued from page 5

What we see from all of this is that the distinguished professor is partly right, but also grievously wrong. While he is correct regarding the erroneous immortal soul doctrine, as we have seen from the Scriptures, Professor Ehrman is clearly in error when he asserts that after death “there is no consciousness, ever again.... God would forget the person.... The most one could hope for was a good and particularly long life here and now.”

How can someone with Ehrman’s credentials—someone so educated and intelligent—be so obviously wrong? The answer lies in something that many sincere professing Christians do not understand. Many, if not most, liberal professors of religion do not believe the Bible, which would also explain why obedience is not high on their agenda! And only the righteous—the obedient—will have His Spirit and understand the Scriptures (Acts 5:32; Daniel 12:9–10).

It is natural to believe that people with lots of credentials from a university must know what they are talking about. This notion is especially tempting because many struggle to

understand the Bible and assume that the most professionally educated people must understand the most. However, nothing could be further from the truth! Jesus prayed, “I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them to babes” (Luke 10:21).

Jesus’ disciples were considered uneducated by the religious authorities of their day. “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled” (Acts 4:13). Of course, they were neither uneducated nor untrained; their education and training was unparalleled, but it came from a source the authorities did not recognize. “And they realized that they had been with Jesus” (v. 13).

Not even the highest human credentials matter with God. Instead, a humble attitude and an obedient mind are truly important to him. As we are told in Isaiah 66:2, “But on this one will I look; on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word.” (LN)

**WHO IS ON THE LORD’S SIDE?** continued from page 8

A few of the functions of the body are roles of the ministry, but many are not. As needs arise, everyone’s service in the body is vital in a different way for the support of our “chapter” to preach the Gospel locally and around the world. Together, as we serve God and His Church, we are laying down our lives as “a living sacrifice,” as Paul explained in Romans 12:1.

**Our Cause, Our Banner**

Before the Israelites ever reached the foot of Mount Sinai and committed the idolatry we discussed earlier, there was another event worth noting. Angry bands of Amalekites had attacked the congregation of the Israelites, and Moses sent Joshua to fight against them. Scripture tells the inspiring story of how God defended His people when they

needed it—and it gives us a clear, concise understanding of where our loyalties should lie.

And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses’ hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun (Exodus 17:11–12).

God’s servants were holding up Moses’ arms, just as we “hold up the arms”

of our leaders today. And then Moses built an altar to honor God’s deliverance. Notice what he called that altar: “Moses built an altar and called its name, ‘The-LORD-Is-My-Banner’” (Exodus 17:15).

There are a lot of slogans people get excited about today. You can find them written on hats and T-shirts, posted on social media, and promoted at sporting events and political rallies. All these slogans are brands for causes of this world. But what is the cause we support? Which “flag” do we wave? And are we on God’s side? Is the Lord our Banner?

Jesus told His disciples, including us, to preach the Gospel to the world as a witness, in preparation for the establishment of the greatest kingdom the world has ever seen. There is no greater cause than that. (LN)

**PRE-ENGAGEMENT COUNSELING** continued from page 13

know for sure that they are ready for marriage and should, indeed, become engaged? Pre-engagement counseling is designed to help a couple clearly understand whether they are truly “right” for each other and are ready for marriage.

There is one more crucial reason why couples should seek counseling before they become engaged. Engagement signals that the individuals have committed to each other and intend to be married. When counseling occurs *after* engagement, couples often minimize it simply as a necessary requirement or “hoop to jump through” in order to get the blessing of the Church on their marriage. *FocusOnTheFamily.com* makes the point that “it’s a good idea to place more stress on pre-engagement counseling than on pre-marital counseling” because “couples who are already engaged are far less inclined to take an in-depth, honest look at their relationship” (“Pre-engagement Counseling,” 2010).

Couples who seek such counsel *before* engagement are usually much more open to learning, growing, and incorporating into their relationship what they learn. And, should something appear that is problematic, they are usually more willing to see it and address it.

**How Do You Begin Pre-Engagement Counseling?**

In order to begin pre-engagement counseling, the interested couple should contact a local pastor. Ideally, the couple’s interest in each other won’t come as a complete surprise to the pastor, but even if it does, the couple can simply let him know that they would appreciate counseling with him about their relationship moving toward engagement and marriage.

**What Pre-engagement Counseling is Not**

Pre-engagement counseling is not a minister’s attempt to prevent a couple from getting married or to point out flaws in their relationship, nor does it require that the couple “bare their souls” to him. It is instead a step toward a better foundation for marriage and a better future. Through pre-engagement counseling, the minister can help direct the couple to deepen their communication and move forward in building a healthy relationship.

**Learn and Grow**

Pre-engagement counseling is certainly built on sound biblical principles. This counseling tool is a powerful opportunity for couples to lay a far more solid foundation for future marriage than they might without it.

In my own experience as a minister, I have observed that, although some couples may be uncertain at the start of the counseling process, virtually all of them have been grateful and appreciative for what they learn *through* the process. Some have even commented that much of what they learned and discussed throughout the pre-engagement counseling process added greatly to the quality of their relationship as well as to their peace of mind going into marriage. This is also true of couples for whom it is not a first marriage, and even for those who have in the past had good marriages that ended only with the death of a spouse.

God’s Church has long encouraged pre-engagement counseling for the benefit of the couple and their future family. Why wouldn’t a couple considering marriage want to take advantage of this powerful tool? To learn more about pre-engagement counseling, talk to your local pastor. (L)

**TWELVE TRUTHS** continued from page 11

chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (1 Peter 2:9).

Indeed, there is no room for racism or bigotry of any type in true Christianity. Scripture states that “there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him” (Romans 10:12). The great hope and promise of the true Gospel is available to *all* whom God calls, who follow and obey Jesus Christ, and who keep His commandments: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29).

**The Promise to Abide Forever**

What is the Gospel of the Kingdom of God? It is the only real hope for this world. It is the “food” and the “work” that true Christians will support with all their heart. It is the proclamation of Jesus Christ’s return and of a real Kingdom that He will establish as King of kings. It is the promise that His coming Kingdom will be without end (Isaiah 9:7). We can have faith and conviction that by His divine power, we have been given promises “that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3).

The Apostle John instructed that we should “not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15–17). This physical life and Satan’s world will pass away, but our faith in Jesus Christ and the promises of the true Gospel can be assured! (L)

## Behind the June 2021 Cover: When Cancel Culture Comes for the Bible



Pictured here is the cover of the June 2021 issue of *Tomorrow's World* magazine, which stirred a great deal of discussion when it was published! Mr. Benjamin Graham designed this eye-catching image to highlight Mr. Wallace Smith's enlightening article "The Subtle Art of Canceling the Bible." Mr. Graham commented:

When we design for a TW cover, it's never a linear, straightforward process—it's actually throwing a lot of stuff against a wall and hoping it sticks. We start with basic concepts and build on those. When we receive the notes for what articles may be featured, we try to think of the best way to convey those messages in pictures.

We discussed early on if the idea of Mr. Smith's article could be conveyed clearly enough on a cover, so as to not confuse the audience. Early drafts had different takes on a Bible with a red "cancelled" stamp on it—fairly straightforward concepts. A coworker would frequently stop by my office for a separate project, and he would comment each time on the state of whichever cover happened to be on my screen at the time. None really impressed him—until, finally, when he saw the first draft of the "warning" cover, he immediately had a strong reaction: "This would make me pick that up and start reading." Comments like those are neat, because that's largely what we're trying to do—get people to read.

A lot of the feedback we've received on this cover has been somewhat similar, with many seeing the cover online and thinking at first, *No way!* But afterward, once they read Mr. Smith's article, they think, *Aha!* While it may seem confusing at first, the message the article is conveying becomes even more apparent and impactful because of the immediate reaction to the cover. It was a testament to just how strange these times have become—just how many people have recognized this type of warning and already understand what's at stake in our culture of social discourse.

Mr. Smith's "The Subtle Art of Canceling the Bible" is a powerful testimony of these strange and sobering times, detailing how biblical values are being shunned everywhere from government meetings to online retail. He made these comments about what inspired him to delve into this topic:

The idea for this article actually came to me around a year or so ago, before "cancel culture" had grown to the extent we see it today. It occurred to me that many of the concepts that critics were vigorously working to remove from the marketplace of ideas were essentially biblical ideas. The concepts that gender is an attribute fixed by God, that life shows evidence of intelligent design, that children should not be killed before they are born just because their parents don't want them—so many of the ideas that seem to cause such vehement outrage in some people, even when they are put forward by atheistic, non-religious people, are actually biblical in nature.

It struck me that the Bible has been an essentially "unbannable" book throughout history, no matter how passionately its ideas are hated, and that this seemed to represent a new approach: Banning the book one piece at a time by banning the individual ideas inside the book.

Talking about the idea that year with Mr. John Robinson, a title came to mind: "The Subtle Art of Banning the Bible." I wanted to use "B\*ble" in place of "Bible" in the same fashion in which some censor "bad words" on the Internet, but we realized some readers wouldn't get that. Then, many months later when I finally wrote the article, the phrase "cancel culture" had grown so commonly understood that it seemed right to use the word "cancel." And Ben's cover for the article just captured the idea perfectly, using the style too many of us are now used to seeing on our social media feeds for "dangerous" content.

This cover also highlights Mr. Richard Ames' fascinating article "Amazing Bible Prophecies Fulfilled!" in which he proclaims that "God's word—the Bible—has shown itself true not only in prophetic fulfillment, but in the Way of life it proclaims." In addition, it features Mr. Simon Roberts' "A Life of Service," which summarizes the life of the late Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and describes some of the lessons of "duty, service, and family" we can learn from his example.

—Editorial Staff

## Electronic Service Requested

### Rejecting Nihilism and Embracing Hope

**Y**ears ago, a television ad posed the question, “If you’re going nowhere today, where will you be tomorrow?” I was impressed by its message since, as a young teen, I was at that age where the mind starts to mature and focus more on the future. As we grow up, we inevitably look beyond the current day and develop a “game plan” for life.

Traditionally, people make decisions in regard to distant and interim objectives. *What do I want to do for a livelihood? What is needed for me to work in that career or job? Where do I want to live? Who should I settle down with to have a family?* As we mature toward adulthood, the answers to these and other questions should come into greater focus.

These days, it seems that a growing number of people are frozen in place without moving toward maturity. Many seem to be going nowhere, much like the subject of the Beatles’ tune “Nowhere Man”—“He’s a real nowhere man, sitting in his nowhere land, making all his nowhere plans for nobody. Doesn’t have a point of view, knows not where he’s going to....”

What keeps you going? On a daily basis, what do you look forward to? Hope is a motivator that points toward the future. We hope for what we do not yet have—but at least if we have hope in something we have an objective.

Looking at themselves and the world, many struggle to find a nexus for engagement. They see a world filled with contradictions and strife. Thinking they have little benefit by engagement, they more or less settle in a zone devoid of hope, occupying time in endless fantasy or escapism.

Ideas have consequences. One idea or philosophy that gained ground in the mid-nineteenth century was *nihilism*, the idea that traditional values and beliefs are unfounded and that existence is senseless and useless since there is no objective ground of truth—especially moral truth.

Damascene Christensen, in his foreword to *Nihilism: The Root of the Revolution of the Modern Age* by Eugene Rose, wrote, “Nihilism—the belief that there is no Absolute Truth, that all truth is relative—is... the basic philosophy of the 20th century: ‘It has become, in our time, so widespread and pervasive... that there is no longer any “front” on which it may be fought.’” The heart of this philosophy, he said, was “expressed most clearly by Nietzsche and by a character of Dostoyevsky in the phrase: ‘God is dead, therefore man becomes God and everything is possible.’”

It is no accident that the rise of philosophies such as nihilism gained prominence with the decline in religious devotion. King David wrote twice, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Psalm 14:1; 53:1). God is alive and well, whereas Nietzsche is dead.

There can be no fulfillment in life without worthwhile objectives. Rather than simply giving up, embracing a philosophy such as nihilism, and losing oneself in endless escapism, there is a better course. If the current state of affairs looks unappealing, set your hope on the future. There is a bright future ahead for everyone who will be in the soon-coming Kingdom of God.

David also wrote in Psalm 33:15 that “He fashions their hearts individually; He considers all their works.” Reject hopelessness and embrace the truth—that God not only is alive, but also cares deeply for *your* life and the lives of all human beings!

—Brian Pomicter