

**How to be a member of the true church** RODNEY NELSON

LifeAssuranceMinistries.org

# Proclamation!

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FOR FORMER ADVENTISTS • INQUIRING ADVENTISTS • SABBATARIANS • CONCERNED CHRISTIANS

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**Emerging church:  
Departing or abiding?**



# You can be adopted too

RICHARD TINKER

I am adopted. When you read those words, what do you feel? I hope that after reading this issue of *Proclamation!* your thoughts and feelings about adoption are changed. And maybe you will seek adoption if you haven't already been adopted.

I was born into a very conservative Adventist family. My parents made sure that our family

practiced the "family altar" by having morning and evening worship every day. We read Ellen White in the mornings, and we studied the church's Sabbath School lessons in the evening.

We seldom missed the

mid-week prayer meeting, and as I got older, Junior Missionary Volunteer meetings on Sabbath afternoon and Pathfinders were added.

My natural family also practiced the church's health message by not eating meat or using stimulating condiments such as ketchup and black pepper. Homemade desserts had less than the called for sugar, and "free fats" such as butter and oil were replaced by ground nuts.

I would look around at my classmates and friends and notice that they weren't as good at keeping the Adventist rules as I was. I was proud of my family for being true to our church. I decided very early in my life that I would give my whole life to working for this church.

But another family was calling. As I studied my Bible, I found that much of my life was built on false security and unbiblical teachings. I also found a Savior who had forgiven all my sins—past, present, and future. And I discovered that He wanted to give me a new family identity, one that is more real than blood.

I now have a Father who is the Sovereign over all. I have a Brother named Jesus who died for me, and I have wonderful brothers and sisters in the body of Christ.

I once counted the number of generations my family was Adventist. I now depend on the finished work of Jesus on the cross. I once worried that a forgotten sin would send me to annihilation, but now I know I am part of God's family forever.

When my birth family is less than kind and sometimes angry that I betrayed their religion I can look to my new identity and family ties in Christ for my security. My identity is no longer "son of the Tinkers" but is son of God and joint heir with Christ. I no longer depend on my earthly family to show me who I am. I am now part of a family not dependent on biological ties. My new family is my family of faith.

My eyes filled with tears of happiness as my wife Colleen adopted my two sons in April. They now have new identities—even getting new birth certificates. And by law Colleen can never un-adopt them—much like our Father in heaven makes us part of His family forever.

Are you adopted?

In this issue **Bill Ziprick** tells his story of leaving Adventism and finding freedom in Jesus. He includes details of his experience as legal counsel for the Adventist health care system at Loma Linda. Next **Rick Langer** gives pointers on how to discern whether a church is abiding or departing from the faith passed down to us from Christ and the apostles. **Colleen Tinker** tells the story of adopting my sons and how, like adoption, our rebirth gives us a new identity, and **Rodney Nelson** writes on the topic of what is involved in being a member of the true church. Finally, **Greg Taylor** gives his many reasons to be grateful to God, and **Roy Tinker** lets us read his letter to the Bible study group he leads.

May you be blessed and called to follow Jesus no matter the cost. †

**I once counted the number of generations my family was Adventist. I now depend on the finished work of Jesus on the cross.**

## Proclamation!

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# Maligning Adventists?

At the conclusion of the presentation on Friday night at the Former Adventist Fellowship (FAF) weekend this past February, some time was given to questions. In the allotted time we were not able to answer all the questions which were submitted, so I will address a few more of them in this column.

**Q. The Adventist denomination has a special message from God to the world: “The Adventist message to all the world in this generation.” What’s wrong with that message?**

**A.** The “Adventist message” is not the apostolic gospel. Rather it is a confusing, unbiblical message that compromises the simple gospel of Christ and is based primarily on the early experience of the founders of the Adventist church supported by the writings of Ellen White. Read *Truth About Adventist “Truth”* and *Cultic Doctrine* for more complete answers.

**Q. Isn’t it unfair to Seventh-day Adventist Christians to talk about them as though they all believe the same thing?**

**A.** First, we do not claim that all Adventists believe the same thing. We understand that there are Historical Adventists, Social Adventists, Liberal Adventists, Post Modern Adventists and Evangelical Adventists. Second, all Adventists should—although many do not—believe in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs. We evaluate Adventism by these official teachings which include the writings of Ellen White.

**Q. Explain the Adventist doctrine of Satan becoming the scapegoat taking responsibility for sin.**

**A.** This teaching had its foundation in Adventism with the vision of Hiram Edson on October 23, 1844, and teaches that when Christ completes the atonement just before the second coming, He transfers the sins of the righteous to the head of Satan who is responsible for causing the righteous to sin. Satan is then punished for those sins. Please read my article on, “What is the Meaning of the Cross” in the March/April 2002 *Proclamation!* for more on this topic.

**Q. In Colossians 2:16 Paul says let no one judge you in food, drink, festivals, new moons or a “Sabbath day.” Adventists seem to contend that “Sabbath day” in this context refers to the yearly “Sabbaths” but not to the seventh-day of the week. Which is true? How do you prove it?**

**A.** The terms used follow a specific pattern. Yearly festivals (yearly “Sabbaths”), new moons, (monthly celebrations) Sabbath days (weekly Sabbaths). These are found in either

Answering questions at the last FAF weekend included (L-R) Paul Carden, Dale Ratzlaff, Colleen Tinker, Greg Taylor and moderator Jonathan Bilima.



ascending (weekly, monthly, yearly) or descending (yearly, monthly, weekly) order in the Old Testament. In Colossians 2:16, the term “festivals” stands for the seven yearly “Sabbaths” and therefore, the term “Sabbaths” must refer to the seventh-day weekly Sabbath. Compare Ezekiel. 45:17 for a parallel example. For a thorough study of this text see *Sabbath in Christ*, p. 185–198.

**Q. There is a great controversy between Christ and Satan, but the Christian world does not understand it. Could we say that you are maligning Adventists when all they are doing is trying to preach the gospel?**

**A.** Adventists read into the Bible much of their “great controversy” teaching which they derive from the writings of Ellen White who, in turn, took these ideas from others. According to the Bible, the cross was the demonstration of God’s justice and righteousness. The Adventists’ teaching that God is waiting for a representative group to perfectly keep the law to demonstrate that the law can be kept undermines the work of Christ, “Whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:25, 26). The Adventist view of the great controversy is largely unbiblical. One must read “into” Scripture—often from obscure apocalyptic passages—the teachings of Ellen White to arrive at this theology. Adventists do not preach the simple Apostolic Gospel. One can read through the New Testament as I have done many times and never find the unique teachings of Adventists. They cannot be supported by contextual Bible study.

The audio files of the 2008 FAF weekend are available at: <http://formeradventist.com/weekends/fafweekend2008.html>

Dale Ratzlaff

Former general counsel for Loma Linda University Medical Center

# Finally forever free in Jesus

**Come with me while I share the journey on which God took me when I came out from Adventism into the full glory of the freedom of the Gospel, and explore the path on which God faithfully led me.**

BILL ZIPRICK

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I was a third generation Adventist, and my grandpa was a conference president and a preacher in Canada. I grew up mostly in the Loma Linda area. I was a junior deacon at the Loma Linda University Church by around age 14 and went through Adventist schools exclusively, all the way until law school, when I went to the University of California at Los Angeles. I married a beautiful Adventist lady, Sally. To her credit, she wasn't quite as good an Adventist as I was, and she always had a little bit more trouble with the rules. For example, at boarding school she could never keep straight which days the sidewalks were for boys and which days they were for girls. She was always ending up on the wrong sidewalks at the wrong time.

After practicing law for a few years I became one of the west coast legal counsels for the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. A few years later that position evolved into our firm becoming general counsel for Loma Linda University Medical Center and the healthcare system at Loma Linda.

### Culture shock

After a few more years, my wife and I moved about 45 minutes away from Loma Linda, and I commuted back and forth to work. We joined a small Adventist church in the area to which we moved, and we became actively involved teaching Sabbath School, serving on the finance committee and the church board, and holding various other responsibilities in our congregation. Up until that time, I had mostly lived my

life in fairly large Adventist communities such as Loma Linda, La Sierra, Angwin (home of Pacific Union College), and Sacramento, where Adventism was pretty comfortable. In those places we had good preachers, schools, and social networking systems. I really hadn't been stretched by the Lord very far at that time. I was, when I look back, still fairly spiritually immature. But then I went through an eye-opening culture shock going to a small Adventist Church, an experience which I'm convinced God allowed. I was introduced full-force to intense legalism and perfectionism and to what those can do to a church.

To illustrate what I mean, I share an example of some conversations I had with an individual who was a lightning rod at that church. He would tell me, in the context of quoting Ellen White, "Bill, if you're a good Adventist, you will become perfect."

I'd say, "Well, you know, I believe that over time we are going to become more spiritually mature and that we should hopefully have more fruit of the Spirit, but I'm fairly certain, in my own opinion, that we're still going to have a sinful nature on this earth."

He'd respond, "No, if you're growing, you will become absolutely perfect in your conduct."

As a result of such attitudes and other related things going on in that local church, we entered five years of firestorms. We endured some of the most mean-spirited things I had ever experienced in my life in a church congregation. There were angry full-church meetings, church board





meetings that were just vicious, a church split, emergency conference meetings, a former pastor verbally ripping apart a present pastor, and a pastor going through a divorce. It was a brutal time.

Those years were spiritually and emotionally draining for my wife and me, and I know they were for others in the congregation as well. As a result of all that was happening, Sally and I just pulled back. We felt ourselves being spiritually crushed by what was going on, and we actually stopped going to church for many months. Over the course of those months, however, we could tell something was missing in our lives. We were missing the warmth and fellowship of worshiping with a congregation, but we knew we could not go back to that Adventist church. God was tugging us at that time—very quietly, but very surely.

### **Fearful experiments**

I'd rarely been in a non-Adventist church, much less attended one on a regular basis. As the months of our isolation went on, however, Sally and I started to ask ourselves, "Should we give it a shot and try going to a non-Adventist church?" Even the thought of attending anywhere but an Adventist church was foreign to us. We knew that we couldn't handle going on Sunday mornings to church; that step would just be too much like accepting the mark of the beast. We couldn't take such a heavy risk. As a compromise, we looked around to find a church with a Saturday night service. At least that would be on the right day, we rationalized—maybe we

could handle that. So we found a church and we went for a couple of months to the Saturday night service—and then they stopped the service. We looked again and found another church that had a Saturday night service; we went for a couple more months—and then they, too, stopped their Saturday night service. There was only one more church in town that had Saturday night services, but we agreed, "Okay, let's try it."

At first when we began visiting, we would just slip into the services and leave immediately afterward. We hardly talked to anybody. I remember feeling so strange being in another church's sanctuary. We were amazed, however, that the people were so friendly, and there was a Christian warmth to the church. We were listening carefully to the sermons, suspicious of what we might hear, but they were very Biblical, and when the pastors gave us Scriptural references, we'd go check them out when we got home—and they were right out of the Bible. I know that biblical accuracy is something that a person should expect from a Christian pastor, but trusting these people was still a struggle for us because these preachers weren't part of the "remnant."

How would these church experiments work out, we wondered? It was during this time of searching that we started to read the Bible more, without Ellen White's interpretation. We actually bought some non-Adventist Bible commentaries and started using them, and we found them very helpful.

There was one sermon in particular that got our attention. It was on the book of Daniel, the first in the hard-core Adventist "Daniel and Revelation" duo on which Adventists

pin their unique doctrines: the investigative judgment and the great controversy. When Sally and I heard Daniel was the topic, we thought, "This should be interesting." We were on high alert.

I will remember the words of the preacher. He got up and said, "I want you to know that I have studied this extensively. I'm going to give it my best shot, and I think this is Biblical. But I'm not going to tell you that my understanding is the end all and be all. I want you to go study the Scriptures yourself." Sally and I instantly looked at each other; that comment was so different from what we were used to hearing. As we talked about it later, we were both astonished by that evening. We were so used to Adventist pastors and teachers presenting Daniel and Revelation with a "Here is the interpretation, and this is what you need to take from this study" attitude. To actually have a pastor say, "I think this is really good stuff, and I want you to go study more," was one of the most defining moments for us on our journey.

#### **Institutional conflicts**

God being God, He was not content just to hit us with one barrel of his shotgun. He knew that I was kind of stubborn and needed an extra push—which He provided. I was still

representing the Adventist Church's health care system at Loma Linda with my law firm. A significant part of my work was advising the board of trustees. The makeup of the board of trustees involved the highest level of the general conference (G.C.) of the Adventist Church. Our firm worked with the president, with other G.C. officers, and with division, union, and conference officers. It's a big group of people, and I worked extensively with them for almost two decades.

I had a lot of fascinating experiences during those years that led me to a few observations. My first observation concerns the doctrine of the "remnant" in the Adventist Church, a belief which basically states that Seventh-day Adventists are God's one true remnant church of Bible prophecy. Implicit in this doctrine is the belief that Adventists have the truth, and no one else does. I saw that belief was a trap at times for church leaders, because it became very hard for them ever to admit mistakes or to acknowledge they were wrong. If a person did admit to being wrong, and if that person were the head of the "remnant," well—such a situation would detract from the whole aura of the remnant. After all, if you've got the truth, how can you be wrong?

Another observation I had is that in the Adventist Church there is a very strong hierarchy from the top down. The inner workings of the church are highly political, probably far more than what most people understand. What the top officials say, is what goes. Pastors and employees are very much expected to follow the company line. This expectation is not that surprising in light of the history of the Adventist church. When one goes back and reads through the testimonies of Ellen White, a woman whom we all know was fairly significant in the founding of the church, on many occasions when people disagreed with her, they got a pretty good roasting. At the highest and deepest levels of the church, therefore, I experienced this tradition: if the leadership was speaking, it was law.

I always thought that the similarities between Catholicism and Adventism with regard to their top-down power structures as well as other traditions including extra-Biblical authority, were somewhat ironic because, as an Adventist, I had always heard about the problems with Catholicism's hierarchy and about Ellen White's extra-biblical prophecy that we would be persecuted some day because of Sunday laws supposedly to be masterminded by the extra-biblical authority, the pope.

As a result of my experiences with the hierarchy of the Adventist church, one of my other observations was that independent thought was not encouraged. In fact, if a person truly had a lot of independent thought, that made him or her dangerous. Because of my close interactions with the church hierarchy, when I hear the stories of people like Dale Ratzlaff, Mark Martin, Richard Tinker, and Greg Taylor, they really ring with authenticity for me as they resonate with my own experiences with Adventist church leadership.

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I'll share a story that happened many years ago to illustrate my point. There were some controversial issues that I and the board of trustees were dealing with. Our law firm had to give difficult but firm legal opinions on a particular issue. I was in a very intense, three-hour meeting one day with three of the top church leaders, defending the legal position we had taken. One of the key leaders turned to me about halfway through the meeting and said, "Bill, if you were a pastor and you had given me that opinion, I would have been very, very disappointed with you."

I responded, "But I'm not a pastor, I'm a lawyer, and you pay me to defend the institutions." I knew what he had meant by his comment, as I knew the individual fairly well, and what he was saying was that if I had been a pastor, it would have been unacceptable for me to express such an independent opinion to him or to other church brethren.

Eventually, after almost 20 years of my working with the church brethren, that professional relationship came to an end. During those final years, however, God had been opening my eyes. Through the experiences that God allowed my wife and me to have at the local church level coupled with the opportunity to see things at the highest church level, and through Bible study and the work of the Holy Spirit, God had fully awakened me and made it clear that it was really time to leave the Adventist church.

### My resignation

It wasn't until recently that I formally tendered my resignation to the Adventist church. I would like to share just a few excerpts from my resignation letter:

Through this lengthy and often times painful but enlightening process, I came to a number of conclusions, which include but are not limited to, the following:

- If I am saved solely through my faith and trust in Jesus Christ who died to pay the price for my sins (as the Bible so clearly states repeatedly), then "keeping the Sabbath," which is such a preeminent doctrine of the SDA Church, cannot save me. If it could, I would be able to save myself through my works, and the Scriptures are so clear that that is not possible. In turn, there is nothing in Scripture which identifies the Sabbath as the "Seal Of God," but in contrast it is clear that the sealing of the Holy Spirit is based upon an individual's absolute loyalty to God.
- I have come to realize that any denomination which holds that an individual is a prophet (outside of the

prophets clearly revealed in Scripture) and accordingly gives the belief/writings of that individual equal weight (or in some cases, higher weight) than the Bible, is a cult. The SDA Church has clearly done that with Ellen White, and as difficult as it was for me to admit it, without realizing it, I had been a member of a cult for many years. God is so clear in his Holy Scriptures that the Holy Scriptures stand alone as the Word from God, and that any claim that someone is a prophet who can infallibly interpret Scriptures for others is nothing more than an absolutely false claim.

- The Investigative Judgment, supposedly one of the pillars of the SDA Church, is not supportable when you carefully study the Scriptures in their entirety. It is a horrendous doctrine which robs the genuine believer of any assurance of salvation. It is a work-based doctrine and leads to constant questioning whether an individual has been "good enough" to survive the judgment. In contrast, the Scriptures are so clear that God wants us to be absolutely certain, as Paul repeatedly stated, that our salvation is sure and cannot be lost.

- The claim of the SDA Church that it is the "remnant" cannot be found or supported by any objective reading of the Holy Scriptures. I have come to see how exclusive and arrogant that claim is, and how demeaning it is to the body of Christ to take the position that only through the SDA Church can an individual be saved.

I am also convinced that many in the leadership of the SDA Church are fully aware of these and many other problems, but that it is not "convenient" to face the truth and follow God's leadings, regardless of the consequences. I shall continue to pray for the SDA Church and its members, which include many family and friends, that someday there will be a full awakening to the truth, as revealed in God's Scriptures.

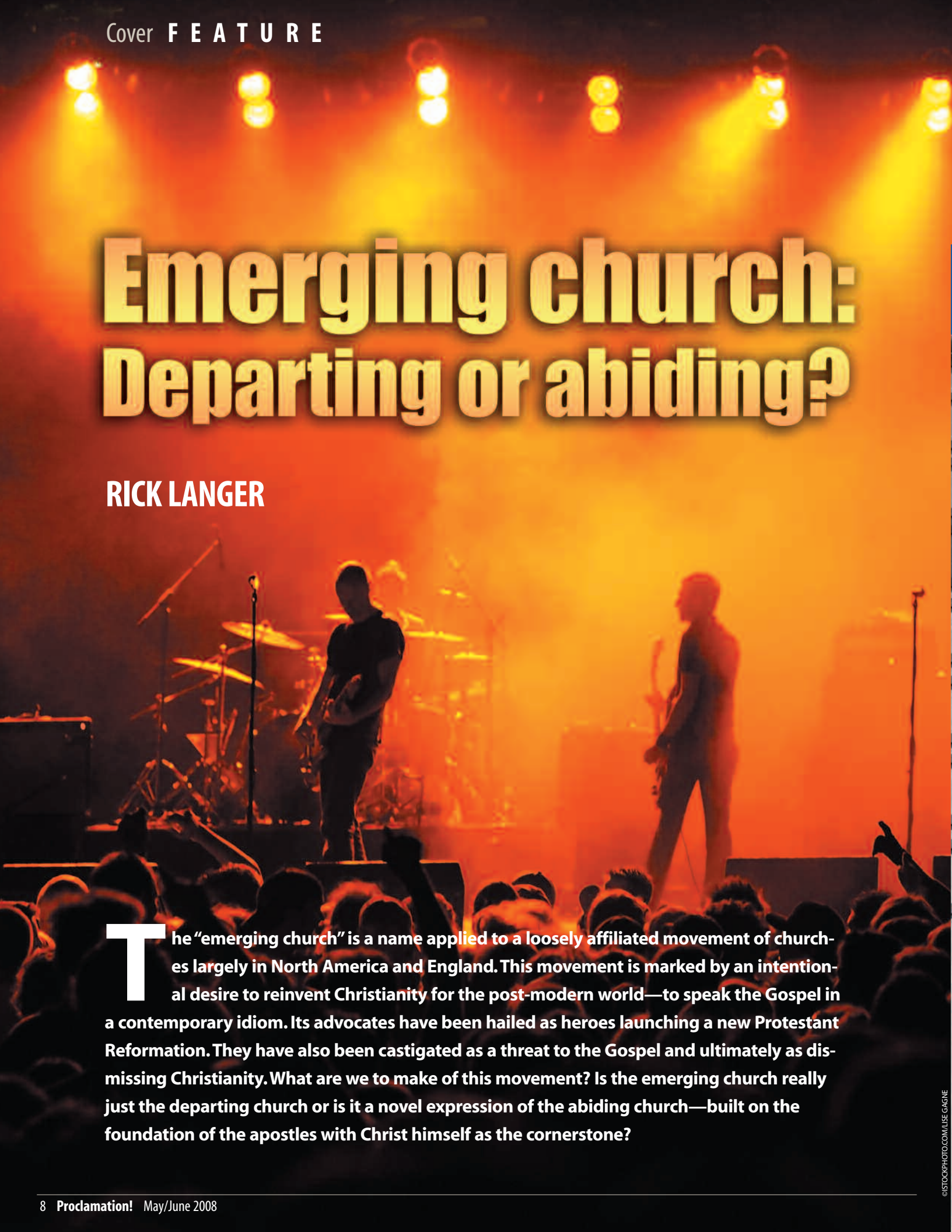
Some months ago God led my family and me to move to Washington and guided us, as we looked at many churches, to a wonderful Christian congregation in northern Spokane, Crossover Community Church. He has brought me into the full freedom of the gospel and the absolute assurance that I am saved, that I have been sealed by the Holy Spirit. And no one, no demon, no person, no false doctrine, and no legalism, can separate me from the love, the eternal love, of my Savior and God. †



**William (Bill) F. Ziprick** was raised as an active third generation Adventist in Loma Linda, California. He received his business degree from Pacific Union College and his law degree from UCLA. He is presently C.E.O. of Ephesians Equity Group, LLC, which relocated from southern California to Spokane, Washington, just a few months ago. Bill's journey out of Adventism began in the mid-90s, as God led him and his wife through a series of events which awakened them to the full truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Bill and his wife Sally and son Austin currently worship at Crossover Community Church, a dynamic congregation in the north part of Spokane.

# Emerging church: Departing or abiding?

**RICK LANGER**



**T**he “emerging church” is a name applied to a loosely affiliated movement of churches largely in North America and England. This movement is marked by an intentional desire to reinvent Christianity for the post-modern world—to speak the Gospel in a contemporary idiom. Its advocates have been hailed as heroes launching a new Protestant Reformation. They have also been castigated as a threat to the Gospel and ultimately as dismissing Christianity. What are we to make of this movement? Is the emerging church really just the departing church or is it a novel expression of the abiding church—built on the foundation of the apostles with Christ himself as the cornerstone?



### Distinctives of the “emerging church”

Any attempt at exact definition of the emerging church will meet with frustration because there is nothing exact about the emerging church. There is no single organization that constitutes the emerging church—its churches cross all denominational boundaries. There is no bishop, pope, or leader of the emerging church. The emerging church is more likely to write blogs than books. It is more likely to open a coffee shop than convene a church council.

Therefore, it seems more profitable to identify distinctives of the emerging church rather than to attempt a definition. Though these distinctives are not universally true of emerging churches, my intent is to communicate distinctives that are broadly shared and generally descriptive of a significant portion of the emerging church.

### Distinctives of style

**Young:** The emerging church is self-consciously trendy, contemporary, and relevant. It is very concerned to be a church that is looking forward rather than backward. It is pre-occupied with embodying the Gospel in our current cultural moment. One result of this pre-occupation is that the participants in emerging congregations are often very young. The “single and under-30” demographic that is missing in many traditional churches predominates in the emerging church. In fact, many of the leading emerging churches grew out of “Gen X” services at more traditional evangelical churches. These services targeted at “20-somethings” gradually transformed into free-standing congregations.

**Non-traditional:** The contemporary mindset of the emerging church finds expression not only in its demographic but also in a variety of other tangible manifestations: stage-in-the-center replaces altar-in-the-front, orders of service change radically week-by-week or may be lacking altogether, worship services abounding in media, arts, dance and contemporary culture. Like modern clothing, emerging churches like to have their labels on the outside—they will often say “we do church differently.” “Different” is a rallying cry.

**Attachment and detachment:** The emerging church has a paradoxical inclination to both distance itself and attach itself to previous expressions of Christianity. Specifically, they seek to distance themselves from the evangelical mega-church movement of the preceding generation. They see mega-churches as having been a mile-wide and an inch deep, as having ignored the social needs of our society, and having been marketed and unauthentic. They are also skeptical of traditional “forms” of church more generally: pulpit-centered, Sunday (or Sabbath)-centered; belief-centered; institutionally centered. And most fundamentally, many emerging churches seek to distance themselves from the fairly common evangelical view of the Protestant Reformation as a sort of theological equivalent to V-E Day. Though they may not condemn the Reformation, they often see it as a very mixed blessing if it is seen as a blessing at all.

At the same time, the emerging church does want to attach to the past. They hate things that are 20 years old, but they love things that are 2000 years old. If pressed for a doctrinal statement, they will often appeal to the Apostles’ Creed (or Nicene Creed) rather than any contemporary confession. They treasure these ancient creeds as long-enduring statements of consensus among Christians. They can thereby distance themselves from modern theological distinctions which have often caused division and acrimony. Emerging churches often pick up ancient worship practices including traditional prayers, the lighting of candles, and even traditional liturgies. Some people see this as a Christian expression of a broader contemporary quest for roots and “authenticity.”

**Questioning:** Finally, it seems the emerging church often adopts an ethos of questioning. Questioning is seen as a virtue, not a vice. It is partly a sensitivity to post-modern thought in which there are no fixed points. Those who suggest or demand fixed points are culturally out of place and *ought* to be questioned. But questioning is also part of a quest for personal authenticity—a sort of Christianized version of Socrates’ famous claim that the “unexamined life is not worth living.” This sentiment is nicely captured by Dan Kimbal, pastor of an emerging church who observes:

But so many churches don’t seem to be open to wrestling with anything, predetermining everything from a former systematic theology textbook the pastor of the church used in seminary. What I also found in most conservative evangelical churches is that there wasn’t any room to ask questions, and if you did, you would be under suspicion...

But questioning involves a prophetic aspect, not just a personal aspect. Not unlike Old Testament prophets who questioned established practices of Israel and Judah, the emerging church often feels called to question the practices of more tra-



SHARON CAREY

**Rick Langer presented this topic at the last Former Adventist Fellowship weekend held at Trinity Church in Redlands, California. Make your plans now to attend next February.**

ditional churches. As Brian McLaren comments in *A Generous Orthodoxy*:

Often I don't think Jesus would be caught dead as a Christian, were he physically here today. . . . Generally, I don't think Christians would like Jesus if he showed up today as he did 2,000 years ago. In fact, I think we'd call him a heretic and plot to kill him, too.

### Distinctives of substance

For the emerging church, questioning is not just a matter of style, it is also a matter of substance. Few doubt the merits of questioning styles of worship, but many have grown concerned about the emerging church's tendency to question core doctrines of the Christian faith.

**Question the atonement:** Modern evangelicalism has tended to assume the centrality of the vicarious atonement understood as Christ being a substitute on our behalf to appease the wrath of God against human sin. This doctrine is commonly (though not universally) questioned by the emerging church. Atonement, for many in the emerging church, is a doctrine that emphasizes belief at the expense of praxis (or practice), which is an emphasis they reject. Atonement is not so much a work of Christ in the past but rather a work of the church in the present. For example, consider the comments of Karen Ward:

We are looking for non-propositional ways of coming to understand the atonement, ways that involve art, ritual, community, etc. . . . We have been drawn to lay down theories and enter atonement as the totality of what God did, does, and will do in Christ (life, death, resurrection, and return). We have been beacons to set aside theories and enter atonement as a happening in God, to God, and through God, and for our sake, breaking open and making possible a new way to live life. We are being moved, as a community, beyond theories about atonement, to enter into atonement itself, or at-one-ment—the new reality and new relationship of oneness with God which Christ incarnated (in life, cross, and resurrection) and into which we are all invited “for all time.”

**Question the exclusiveness of Christ:** Traditional affirmations of the Christian faith have affirmed that Jesus is “the only way to God.” This belief is questioned by many in the emerging church. They find such affirmations to be not only excessively narrow but also a reflection of an over-emphasis on belief rather than practice. Scot McKnight summarizes the spectrum of beliefs nicely:

. . . many in the emerging church movement are skeptical about the “in versus out” mentality of much of evangelicalism. . . . some emerging Christians point to the words of Jesus: “Whoever is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:40). Others, borrowing the words of the old hymn, point to a “wideness in God’s mercy.” Still others take postmodernity’s crushing of metanarratives and extend that to master theological narratives—like Christianity. They say what really matters is orthopraxy and that it doesn’t matter which religion one belongs to, as long as one loves God and one’s neighbor as one’s self. Some even accept Spencer Burke’s unbiblical contention in A

*Heretic’s Guide to Eternity* (Jossey-Bass, 2006) that all are born “in” and only some “opt out.”

**Question systematic theology:** It is not uncommon for Christians to question one another’s theology. What is different in the case of the emerging church is that they are questioning the entire task of theology. Consider this analogy: I am a devoted fan of the Denver Broncos football team, but for the past 10 years, I have questioned the Broncos defense. But this means that I question the quality of the Broncos defense, not the need for the Broncos defense. In fact, my questioning the *quality* of their defense has been *premised* upon their *need* for a defense. Traditionally, when people have questioned one another’s theology, they have questioned the quality of each other’s theology and assumed the need for it. The emerging church is very different. It is questioning the *need* for theology. Doctrinal statements and systematic theologies are generally assumed to be by-products of the Enlightenment and responses to modernism which have outlived their usefulness in the context of the post-modern West.

**Question truth:** The emerging church tends to embrace much of the post-modern critique of truth, feeling that traditional evangelicalism is captive to modernist notions of truth. Doug Pagitt, a pastor of an emerging church congregation and an influential spokesperson for the movement, argues that theology is not about identifying and affirming timeless truths. It should be about story, about conversation, perhaps even about . . . dance. He relates his church’s attempt to address the controversial issue of Pelagianism—a fifth century heresy strongly rejected by Augustine. He wanted people to understand that it was not so much a disagreement about truth but rather people dancing to different songs:

We asked a member of our community, Tim Lyles, to play on his guitar a series of songs, and we asked our people to consider what kind of dance would go with each song. . . . When Tim played a Spanish tango-style song, our minds moved away from the waltz we were thinking of after his previous selection. When he played an Appalachian tune, our minds conjured yet another image. . . . So it is with cultural worldviews and understandings of theology. For the Irish of Pelagius’ land, the dance that went with the song was Celtic spirituality. This meant finding the goodness in creation and organizing the church to live in harmony with the God of the earth. For the Greeks of Augustine’s land, the dance was Roman spirituality. This called for an explanation of how one might appease the removed God living in an “elsewhere heaven.”

Ultimately, issues traditionally considered matters of truth and orthodoxy are really just matters of style. Theology and truth are reduced to song and dance.

### Responding to the emerging church

So how does the emerging church and its questions measure up to Scripture?

First, a few cautions are in order. As I mentioned at the outset of this article, there is tremendous diversity in emerging churches, and the distinctives mentioned above are not found



in every emerging church. This is particularly true of doctrine. Doctrinal questions must be answered congregation by congregation. Furthermore, many of the stylistic concerns of the emerging church are legitimate and appropriate. They seek to be contemporary. They hope to speak to the next generation in their native language. Personally, I believe the emerging church should be commended and encouraged in this attempt. As the Reformers themselves said of the church: *"Reformatus est semper reformandum"* (the church "reformed and always reforming").

But there are matters of substance here that must be addressed. Many in the emerging church contend that contemporary attitudes toward doctrine are a by-product of modernism and the Enlightenment. This cuts across the current of much of traditional evangelicalism which is very concerned with belief and sound doctrine. Specifically, the doctrine of the vicarious atonement offends modern sensibilities on several levels. Claiming that Jesus died to appease the wrath of God against human sin entails a God who judges sin and is provoked to wrath. This vision of God is unwelcome in post-modern culture. Furthermore, if a perfect sacrifice has to be offered to appease God's wrath, it seems difficult to avoid some level of exclusivity. After all, how many perfect sacrifices have been offered? And exclusivity entails a fairly absolute notion of truth, because one cannot exclude without a clearly defined boundary. So the doctrine of the atonement carries with it the unwelcome triad of appeasing, believing, and excluding—and this goes a long way toward explaining why this has become such a bone of contention with the emerging church.

Perhaps the simplest response to these contentions is to study the earliest sermons of the church—those found in the book of Acts and other key passages of the New Testament. Obviously these passages not only pre-date the Enlightenment, but they also contain our most ancient expressions of the Gospel. They are the best place to find the core of the Christian faith once for all delivered to the saints. Let us consider the atonement and several related doctrines in light of these passages.

**The Atonement:** The book of Acts contains an abundant witness to the apostolic message of the Gospel. Simply put, it is a message of forgiveness of sin through belief in the person and work of Christ. Furthermore, the application of Christ's work is accomplished through a response of repentance and belief; it was not applied generically or universally to all people. Though there is room for debate about exactly how Christ's life, death and resurrection cleanses us from sin, there is no room for debate as to whether or not this was the central message of apostolic preaching. Consider the following passages:

"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins..." (Acts 2:38).

"Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out..." (Acts 3:19).

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

"God... raised Jesus whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:30-31).

"And he commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify... that every one who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:42-43).

"Let it be known to you therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him every one that believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses..." (Acts 13:38, 39).

In all of these passages, hearers are called to repent and believe in order to be saved from their sins. This response is visibly expressed by baptism and then lived out by becoming a member of the Christian community. The pivotal decision was to repent and believe. Good works and community life were expected results of salvation; they were not the means of salvation. It seems the emerging church wants to start with the results and shun the means. In this regard it is good to recall the case of Cornelius. His "prayers and alms ascended as a memorial before God"; but as a result, God did not save him but rather sent him Peter so that he might hear the Gospel proclaimed and be saved. His practice was no replacement for believing in the Lord Jesus.

**Nature of Truth:** Though the apostles clearly called people to "believe in the Lord Jesus," their preaching was also full of stories. Does this mean that they were not as concerned about "truth" as we are? Indeed, the apostles' sermons are constantly recounting the story of Israel culminating in the Messiah who

**Emerging churches often pick up ancient worship practices including traditional prayers, the lighting of candles, and even traditional liturgies. Some people see this as a Christian expression of a broader contemporary quest for roots and "authenticity".**



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brought salvation to all (see sermons in Acts 2, 3, 7). However, their messages always assume the story they are telling is historically factual. Just like calls by the Psalmists to remember the saving interventions of the Lord, the whole point is that these events really happened. The story is history—events that truly took place. It is not mythology. Truth has no conflict with story—this is just a false dichotomy. Similarly, there is a strong emphasis throughout the book of Acts on the reliability of prophetic Scripture. References to fulfilled prophecy are found in almost every instance of apostolic preaching. There is no question that Scripture, however else it might be used, is used as a source of authority, and statements of both history and prophecy are true in the sense that they correspond with reality. Correspondence with reality is not a modern or an



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...the doctrine of the atonement carries with it the unwelcome triad of appeasing, believing, and excluding—and this goes a long way toward explaining why this has become such a bone of contention with the emerging church.

Enlightenment notion. It is a common sense notion. Though these passages are certainly more than mere abstract statements of truths, they are not less than true. And while “true” may mean more than merely corresponding to reality, it does not mean less.

**Exclusiveness of Christ:** In the book of Acts, it is clear that in proclaiming Jesus, there is an implied or explicit rejection of other religious options. Whether the members of the “synagogue of the Alexandrians” who were refuted by Stephen (Acts 6:9-10), or the religious enthusiasts in Lystra who were rebuked by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:15-17), or the religious pluralists of Athens (Acts 17:22), devout religious people are constantly being confronted and called to change their beliefs. They had to repent of their current beliefs and accept the apostolic message. There was no other option. The full range of alternative beliefs were rejected: ignorant idol worship (Athenians), foreign gods which were well-formed and established (Artemus of the Ephesians, Zeus, etc), magic/spiritualism (Simon the magician), Jewish traditionalism (Acts 3 and 4), Jewish converts who were still demanding law-keeping (Acts 15), and believers in the “baptism of John” who had never heard of Jesus. Any and all of these people received the offer of salvation, but always on the terms of their acceptance of Christ as Messiah.

**Systematic Theology:** It should be noted that systematic theology and creedal statements are not inventions of the modern era or responses to the Enlightenment. They are found in the earliest pages of Scripture and continue to its end. Deuteronomy 6:4 contains a definitional affirmation of the oneness of God—repeated morning and evening by devout Jews to the present day. Old Testament prophets constantly make doctrinal affirmations about the nature of God even as they call God’s people to be faithful to their covenant promises. The earliest New Testament documents include creed-like affirmations (1 Corinthians 15:3-7, as well as creedal hymns in Philippians 2: 5-11 and Colossians 1:15-20). The early church convened its first council in Acts 15 to solve a doctrinal issue regarding what is required for salvation. Doctrine is no replacement for practice, but practice is also not a replacement for sound doctrine.

**Moral Absolutes:** Post-modernism levels all high ground and reduces all boundaries to human convention. Not only are truth claims suspect, but moral claims are suspect as well. It is as inappropriate in the postmodern world to tell someone that they are morally wrong as it is to tell them they are intellectually wrong. The emerging church’s desire to speak in a post-modern idiom has left them in a very awkward position when it comes to drawing moral boundaries. This is particularly true of homosexuality since it is such a sensitive cultural issue. Consider Brian McLaren’s comments:

Frankly, many of us don’t know what we should think about homosexuality. We’ve heard all sides but no position has yet won our confidence so that we can say “it seems good to the Holy Spirit and us.” That alienates us from both the liberals and conservatives who seem to know exactly what we should think. Even if we are convinced that all homosexual behavior is always sinful, we still want to treat gay and lesbian people with more dignity, gentleness, and respect than our colleagues do. If we think that there may actually be a legitimate context for some homosexual relationships, we know that the biblical arguments are nuanced and multilayered, and the pastoral ramifications are staggeringly complex. We aren’t sure if or where lines are to be drawn, nor do we know how to enforce with fairness whatever lines are drawn.

Doug Pagitt clearly shares a similar anxiety about speaking out on this issue

The question of humanity is inexorably linked to sexuality and gender. Issues of sexuality can be among the most complex and convoluted we need to deal with. It seems to me that the theology of our history does not deal sufficiently with the issues for our day... I do not mean that we are a more or less sexual culture, but one that knows more about the *genetic, social, and cultural issues surrounding sexuality* and gender than any previous culture. Christianity will be impotent to lead a conversation on sexuality and gender *if we do not boldly integrate our current understanding of humanity with our theology.* This will require us to not only draw *new conclusions about sexuality*, but will force us to consider new ways of being sexual.

### Field guide for the Emerging Church

I would like to conclude this article with a sort of field guide for distinguishing between emerging churches which



are still abiding churches and those which are actually departing churches.

### Signs of a departing church

Some signs that an emerging church is actually departing from the faith include:

**Rejection of the vicarious atonement:** This can happen at various levels—including levels that may not indicate a church is actually departing from the faith. For example, some emerging churches reject the easy-believism and cheap grace found in some evangelical circles where eagerness to “win souls” pre-empts doctrinal integrity. In effect, a gospel of conversion without discipleship is preached. This superficial “soul-winning” is very disturbing to the emerging church, and some have associated this practice with the doctrine of the vicarious atonement. Therefore, they have distanced themselves from this doctrine in order to distance themselves from cheap grace.

I can understand the desire to reject a doctrine of cheap grace, but one should be very cautious about churches that back away from a simple and clear proclamation that “Jesus died for your sins and that you must believe (and repent) in order to be saved.” Statements of this sort characterize the earliest proclamation of the most essential message of the Gospel. Churches that do not proclaim this message are likely to be departing or to have already departed from the faith.

**Churches that avoid or reject the language of truth:** The New Testament does not back away from the language of truth and neither should we. A church that replaces the language of truth with the language of story is often trying to avoid the inconveniences of mutually exclusive truth claims. At some point the language of truth is an inconvenience that simply has to be accepted or the essential truths of the Gospel will be lost.

**Churches that proclaim Christ as OUR Savior but not as THE Savior:** There is nothing wrong with stating that Christ is our Savior, but in so saying, one should not be trying to avoid the claim that Christ is the only Savior. This is clearly affirmed by Jesus himself (John 14:6) and elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Timothy 2:4 especially).

**Churches that are unwilling to take stands on moral issues:** The Gospel has always cut across the moral current of surrounding cultures. This was true of Ancient Near East culture during Old Testament times; it was true of Greco-Roman culture during New Testament times; it is true of American culture during our time. A church must accept this fact and proclaim and practice biblical morality. Moral ambiguity is not a step

toward cultural relevance; it is a step toward becoming a departing church.

### Signs of an abiding church

**Strong use of Scripture:** Many emerging churches continue to have strong pulpit ministries which offer sound expositional preaching. This is important in its own right, but it is also an indicator that truth is still important to those who are leading the church.

**Willingness to affirm the exclusivity of Christ:** Many emerging churches affirm the exclusivity of Christ and the finality of his work on the cross. This should be clearly stated both in any official doctrinal statements (if there are such statements) and also in the preaching from the pulpit. Many churches avoid focusing on the negatives and so avoid explicit statements about cults or other world religions, but they should still be able to affirm that salvation is found only in Christ.

**Proclamation of the atoning work of Christ and the necessity of belief:** Although there may be conflicts over exactly how Christ accomplished the atonement, there should be no question that he did. There should also be no question that one must believe in him in order to be saved.

**Willingness to state clearly their doctrinal beliefs:** It is very informative to look at the web pages of emerging churches. Some have clear links to doctrinal statements; some have links to links to more links which eventually reveal a doctrinal statement. Some have no doctrinal statements at all but rather statements of dreams, or visions for community life. A church should be willing to identify clearly the doctrine it is preaching. To go back to my earlier garment metaphor, emerging churches may not wear their doctrinal beliefs as a label on the outside of their clothes, but it should be right behind the collar if you look inside. Be suspicious if you find the doctrinal labels cut off!

In conclusion, I would encourage those who are participating or considering participation in an emerging church to be cautious. There are few places in the contemporary church life where Paul’s exhortation to the Thessalonians is more appropriate: “test every teaching, hold fast to what is good.” I have found the people in the emerging church to be sincere, their concerns genuine, and their creativity and energy admirable. But their teaching does not always bear scrutiny. Don’t torch the teachers, but do test the teachings, and hold fast only to what is good. †

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# Adopted Forever

COLLEEN TINKER

**A**pril 23, 2008, was an amazing day. Richard, Roy, Nathanael, and I appeared before a judge in the superior court of San Bernardino County of California, and I legally adopted Roy and Nathanael.

Nineteen-and-a-half years ago, I married Richard and became the stepmother of his two and six-year-old sons. I did not imagine what lay in store for me.

A few months after our wedding, I stood in our kitchen feeling completely overwhelmed. I was committed to nurturing my new stepsons, but I felt incapable of being what they needed. Their needs were beyond me.

The phone rang, and my dear friend Rosalie heard the desperation in my voice. At that moment she spoke truth into my life, and it changed me: "Colleen, you have to remember that you are not loving those boys for your sake or even for their sakes. You are loving them for God."

With those words God taught me how to trust Him with this new assignment He had given me. I didn't have to know what to do, and I didn't even have to have maternal feelings for these children who were suddenly part of my life. All I had to do was to be willing to allow God to love those boys through me.

Many times in the years that followed I prayed that God would show me how to love my sons for Him. Sometimes I would have no idea how to address what was before me, and I would pray silently, "Show me how to love them for you." God answered those prayers—often without my conscious awareness of His purpose or methods. I learned to trust that if I surrendered the moment to Him, He would be faithful to accomplish His will.

The boys' early childhoods were traumatic. Five years after Richard and I were married, Richard was granted primary custody of them. We went through several years, on and off, of counseling, and gradually they began to heal from their early

trauma while I began to learn how to trust God to nurture my heart as He nourished in me a deep commitment and growing love for them.

Last December Rosalie again spoke truth to me as we put away the coffee pot after Friday night Bible study. "Why don't you adopt Roy and Nathanael?"

Startled, I replied, "Because I can't!" And just as suddenly I realized, they're adults now—25 and 21 years old. All that was needed was their consent. When I asked them if they wanted me to adopt them, they were both emotional.

"Why didn't we do this years ago?!" Roy said.

So it happened on April 23—serendipitously the date considered to be the anniversary of Jesus' resurrection. The brief proceeding was surprisingly emotional; I was wiping tears from my eyes as the judge asked me if I agreed not only to adopt them but to make them my heirs, and Richard cried too. Even the court clerk who was bringing the judge his papers cried a little.

Even though this is an adult adoption, each son will be issued a new birth certificate with me listed as the birth mother—just as in infant adoptions. I have been their mother for years, but now there are no technicalities standing between us. They are fully and legally mine, and I am theirs.

About 16 or 17 years ago, early in our marriage as we discovered the depth of the boys' trauma, Richard had a vivid dream. In his dream, the boys' bedroom (which was an addition to the house in which we then lived) was sinking and threatening to be destroyed or broken off. In his dream, Richard hired an engineer to evaluate the situation. The engineer replied, "We can save it, but we have to rebuild the foundation."

Over the years we have remembered that dream, as the boys went through counseling, as we left Adventism, as we watched them accept Jesus, and as we prayed that God would heal their hearts.



For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. Romans 8:15-17

The evening of April 23 I read an email from a friend of mine in another state who had never heard of Richard's dream. She knew the adoption had been occurring that day, and she wrote that during the morning she had been "praying deeply" for us. She said that, without knowing any details, she had a picture of God putting a firm foundation under our family.

I have such a personal awareness of the significance and permanence of what it means for God to adopt us into His family. This is no accident of genetics; when we accept Jesus, we are born of God, and the spiritual reality of the new birth defines us and makes us completely, eternally new. What is spiritual is far more real, far more permanent than what is merely physical.

When I was born again of the Holy Spirit, my life was hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3). It's as if God's name had been entered on my birth certificate. Being adopted by God changed my heritage and past identity. I moved from being in Adam to being in Christ, and my paternity was eternally changed. God's adoption of me also changes my present identity; I am no longer an object of wrath (Ephesians 2:3) but am God's daughter (Romans 8:15-16). My adoption also changes my future; I am now God's true heir, and all that is His is mine in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:17).

Roy and Nathanael are mine by the miracle of the Holy Spirit uniting our hearts and making us true family. They are, in many ways, more "mine" than if they had only been born to me.

The most heart-stopping miracle, though, is the fact that Richard, Roy, Nathanael and I are all God's true children, and the Lord Jesus has placed us in His body. As a human family knit together by His Spirit according to His purpose and grace, we are also being shaped and loved by our true

Father who chose us and saved us by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus.

Because of Jesus, the impossible is real. "God sets the lonely in families" (Psalm 68:6). "He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children. Praise the Lord" (Psalm 113:9). "[Abraham] is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were" (Romans 4:17).

I am God's daughter, and I have two sons.

†



Richard, Roy, Colleen, and Nathanael Tinker with Judge Smith in his chambers right after he signed the adoption orders declaring Roy and Nathanael to be Colleen's legal sons. Colleen is the editor of *Proclamation!*



# How to be a member

RODNEY NELSON

## Adventist Membership

I became a Christian and was baptized in 1977 when I was almost sixteen years of age. I also became a full-fledged member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church—a membership which entitled me to receive the North Pacific Union *Gleaner* free of charge. Before my baptism I had attended the local Adventist congregation for six months, taking Bible studies with the pastor to study Adventist doctrines. Then, just before I was baptized, I went before the local congregation and raised my right hand to confess belief in the twenty-two fundamental doctrines (now expanded to twenty-eight fundamentals) of Seventh-day Adventism. I will never forget that day.

I did not fully understand the twenty-two statements of belief, especially the authority of Ellen White and the investigative judgment. The feeling of being a fully accepted member of the Adventist church, however, was appealing. I belonged to the “remnant church.” The feeling of belonging that came with membership was both reassuring and disconcerting. What about all the people who were not Adventists? I rationalized that question with a variety of pat Adventist answers. One thing I did understand, however: membership in the church was tied to the acceptance of the right beliefs and doctrines. I knew I was a Christian by acceptance of Jesus alone, but membership in the church involved more. It required complete adherence and acceptance of the Adventist “package.” Thus I was introduced to two realities; faith alone made me a Christian, but it was faith and doctrinal fidelity that made me an Adventist.

## To Be or Not to Be a Member

Membership is often a distinguishing characteristic of denominations and congregations and is a continuing issue of debate. Whatever approach believers or congregations take to membership, however, the real issue is what Scripture and New Testament church practice say about it. To that we now turn.

## Definitions

To be a “member” of an organization or group means to be a part of its function. Webster defines it as “each of the persons composing a society, party, community, or other body” (*Webster’s Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*, 1989). Membership implies vital involvement in the

operation of the organization without which it would not function. In a worldly sense, membership describes the status of a person who is incorporated into the inner workings of an organization, while non-members do not have the same privileges and rights. Membership versus non-membership is the difference between being an “insider” looking out and an “outsider” looking in.

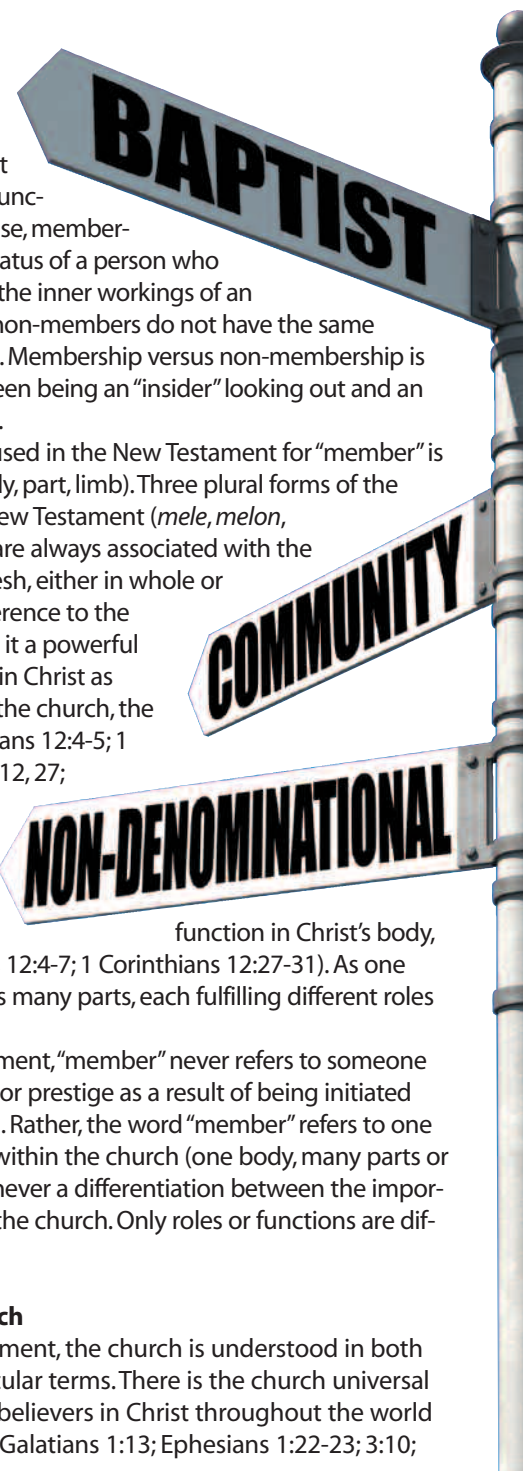
The Greek term used in the New Testament for “member” is *melos* (member, body, part, limb). Three plural forms of the word occur in the New Testament (*mele, melon, melesin*), and these are always associated with the human body and flesh, either in whole or part. This word’s reference to the human body makes it a powerful symbol of believers in Christ as members (parts) of the church, the body of Christ (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Corinthians 6:15; 12:12, 27; Ephesians 5:30). *Melos* further describes believers as having a

function in Christ’s body, the church (Romans 12:4-7; 1 Corinthians 12:27-31). As one body, the church has many parts, each fulfilling different roles and functions.

In the New Testament, “member” never refers to someone who receives status or prestige as a result of being initiated into an organization. Rather, the word “member” refers to one who has a *function* within the church (one body, many parts or members). There is never a differentiation between the importance of persons in the church. Only roles or functions are differentiated.

## Nature of the Church

In the New Testament, the church is understood in both universal and particular terms. There is the church universal referring to all true believers in Christ throughout the world (1 Corinthians 15:9; Galatians 1:13; Ephesians 1:22-23; 3:10;





# r of the true church

CONGREGATIONAL

5:23-27,29,32; Colossians 1:18,24). There is also the church particular where the church is identified as the local body of believers meeting in a specific location (Romans 16:1,5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15-16). The local assembly is “the church in its local expression,” (Ladd; *A Theology of the New Testament*, pg. 537) reflecting style and culture unique to it.

In the Bible the church is never understood as an organization although it possesses

organization. The Greek term for “church” in the New Testament

reveals its essence: *ekklesia* (derived from *ek-kaleo* = “call

CALVARY

EVANGELICAL FREE

out”—a gathering, assembly, congregation). The church, therefore, is best understood as “who”; not “what.” It is not a location or building, and never are believers seen “going to church.” Rather, the church is composed of the people who gather at a location or meet in a structure for worship and fellowship.

The church in the New Testament is an *organism*. This description has sometimes been overused, but the distinction between an organism and an organization (institution) carries provocative implications for understanding what it means to *be* the church. When the church is people—not locations, buildings, or organizations/denominations—then the church is personal and relational. The church is called out by God to gather and assemble for mutual worship, edification, and fellowship. It isn’t a place to go; it is a fellowship of believers. The fellowship is not a place; rather, it describes what occurs in the body of believers wherever they are located.

## The Church and Membership

If the literal meaning of *ekklesia* identifies “church” as those who gather to worship, then *ekklesia* should also inform the meaning of membership.

ALLIANCE

A good place to begin to understand church membership is in the apostle Paul’s reference of the church as the “body of Christ.” A key verse is found in 1 Corinthians 12:12, “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. *So it is with Christ.*” Paul likened the human body and its many parts (members) to Christ. He did not say the human body and its parts are like the church. What he is getting at is that the Church is made up of members of *His* body. As believers in Christ, we have been incorporated into Christ Himself, and we comprise His body. “The church is not a body or society of believers but the body of Christ” (Ladd, 545). We are united or incorporated into the very body of Christ; we are not merely an extension of His body. This is a remarkable concept and a wonderful reality. It really means that every believer is intimately part of Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 6:15).

When Paul experienced the Lord’s presence on the Damascus Road, Jesus asked him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4). Of course, Paul did not persecute Jesus personally, but by persecuting those who believed in Christ, Paul was guilty of persecuting Christ Himself. The same principle is seen in Matthew 10:40 and 25:40.

The objective of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 is to establish that all believers in Christ have become one body—the body of Christ. The Corinthian believers did not become members of a club or organization through baptism, but all were baptized “by one Spirit into one body” (12:13). It did not matter one’s ethnic origin, social status, or class; believers had received “one Spirit to drink” (v. 13).

It is important to understand that all believers become “one body” (v. 12) through the Spirit, not through a list of requirements for membership in an organization. Membership in the body of Christ is determined by the new birth, and one becomes incorporated into the church when one is incorporated into the body of Christ. Becoming part of Christ’s body makes each of us a member of the church.

Since membership is not seen in the New Testament as an induction into an institution or organization but rather as incorporation into the very body of Christ, it follows that believers are “called into membership of this one church of Christ, . . . through the preaching of the gospel. They were brought into fellowship with God’s Son (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:9),

and to speak of their membership of this heavenly gathering assembled around Christ is another way of referring to this new relationship with him" (O'Brien, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, pg. 126).

Likewise, "Christians were to assemble in local congregations here on earth, for this was an important way in which their fellowship with Christ was expressed. Further, as they came together with others who were in fellowship with him, so they not only met with each other—they also met with Christ himself who indwelt them corporately and individually" (O'Brien, 126).

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**CALVARY**

**EVANGELICAL FREE**

Participation and fellowship (*koinonia*) in the body of Christ (the church) is determined by a person's acceptance of the gospel, and we each become part of the church when we become a part of the body of Christ.

#### **Initiation and benefits**

At this juncture it would be natural to ask how a person demonstrates becoming a member of the body of Christ. The book of Acts speaks to this question. In Acts 2:41, Peter's message says those "who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day." In Acts 2:47 "the Lord added to their numbers daily those who were being saved." The previous verses (vs. 42-46) describe the activity of the church as they met together (v. 42), and their care of each other (vs. 44-46). The evidence of their activity and dedication to each other was a powerful witness to the surrounding population. Unbelievers were converted and became incorporated into the church. Acts 5:14 testifies that, despite the death of Ananias and Sapphira (5:1-11) and the resultant fear (v.13), "more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number."

Taken together, these passages reveal an important lesson. They refer to people being added to the church, and in them we see three activities: people accepted the gospel message (2:41) by believing in the Lord (5:13), and then they were baptized (2:41). They were added to the church by the fact they were saved (2:47). There is nothing in the remainder of Acts

that contradicts or supplements the simplicity of this description. Therefore, the inclusion of unbelievers as part of the church was based on their personal acceptance of the gospel message, and their baptisms demonstrated their conversions and commitments to the body of Christ.

Ephesians 1:22-23 declares that "God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." What are the characteristics of those who make up the church? Beginning in v. 3, Paul lists the many blessings that have been given through the death of Jesus (vs. 3-14). In Christ believers are to be holy and blameless (v. 4), are adopted, redeemed, forgiven of sin, and made heirs. As a result of God's blessings, choosing, pleasure, will, and grace, believers "were included in Christ when [they] heard the word of truth, the gospel of [their] salvation. Having believed, [they] were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession" (vs. 1:13-14). This passage is more than a promise and declaration about our salvation; it is a statement of our inclusion in the church. As a member of the church, a believer participates in the reality described by Paul in Ephesians 1. It is a kingdom reality realized now in the church!

One congregation states the church is "Where the new life in Christ makes you a member!" In another denominational statement, the church "believes that when one accepts Jesus Christ as Savior, God places that person in the Church (Acts 2:47; 1 Corinthians 12:18). Salvation is the criteria for membership in a congregation."

In the New Testament, it is impossible to be saved and not be a member of the church. The same conditions and grounds for salvation also make one a Christian and a member of the church. Therefore, the salvation of an individual automatically makes him a part of the church. One writer states clearly that there "is no such thing taught in the New Testament as being saved by one process and then joining the church of our choice by another process."

#### **No Labels, Just Being**

Since the church is the body of believers throughout the entire world, anywhere Christians gather they express the reality of the church. Christians have largely forgotten this reality because they have separated "church" from believers. Thus, we often think today of the church as the place where believers go to worship, as an entity into which believers are initiated through membership. In reality, however, "church" is a statement of identity, not a brand name. It describes who I am—a born-again, adopted son of God who is part of Christ's body—not how I worship or where I meet others.

Paul had to deal with the Corinthians being divided over loyalty to their favorite leaders. In 1 Corinthians he addresses this human tendency to become loyal to labels. In 1 Corinthians 1:2, Paul identifies believers as "the church of God



in Corinth. "They are composed of "those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours." The church of God is the local and universal number of those who call on Jesus' name and are called and made holy by Christ. By this statement, Paul is telling the Corinthians that they are the church because they are believers in Christ.

Paul then moves on to declaring who the Corinthian believers are *in Christ* (1:4-9). They have the grace given them in Christ Jesus (v. 4). In Christ, they are "enriched" in speech and knowledge (v. 5), lacking no spiritual gift (v. 7), and will be kept strong and blameless until Jesus comes again (v. 8). These promises identify more than just the status the Corinthian believers have in Christ; these verses describe the practical reality of the Corinthians' lives.

In v. 9, Paul explains that God has "called [them] *into fellowship* with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" and that He is faithful.

This is an incredibly important statement. The Greek used for "fellowship" is *koinonia* (fellowship, communion, partnership, participation). A link occurs in verses nine and ten between the fellowship of believers with Christ and the relationship of believers with each other. When God established fellowship (communion) between His Son and believers, He also established a fellowship between believers. The vertical relationship established the horizontal one, and the key quality of this fellowship is unity. Unity would be manifested in agreement with one another "so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (v. 10).

As the one Body of Christ, the Corinthian church was to be one in thought and mind. This oneness does not mean "uniformity." Rather, the Greek for "perfectly united" is *katertismenoi* ("being knit together"). The church can be compared to fabric whose individual strands are woven tightly together to make one cloth.

The Corinthian church was not expressing this type of unity. Apparently, their internal division took the form of quarrels between factions of members who were loyal to different notable leaders in the church (v. 12). It wasn't primarily theological issues that divided the Corinthians; they were split by "personality cults" involving allegiances to Paul himself, Apollos (charismatic personality), Peter, and even Christ.

Paul asks, "Is Christ divided?" Jesus was crucified and believers were baptized into His name (v. 13), not into other's names. In other words, why would believers establish loyalties to those who themselves were fellow believers baptized into the name of Christ? Division within the one body of Christ was an oxymoron.

Christians are incorporated into the one body of Christ at the moment of incorporation into Jesus. Division along the

lines of personality partisanship is unthinkable and is totally contrary to the purpose of Jesus' death. Every believer is "in Christ"—hence Paul's rhetorical question, "Is Christ divided?"

It is an exceptional reality that the New Testament talks more about the grounds for people leaving the fellowship than about the grounds for their entrance into fellowship. Membership (fellowship) is established by a relationship with Jesus entitling each believer to be a part of the church, yet denial of continued fellowship (church discipline) is determined by a life of sin and heretical teaching (Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 16:17; 1 Corinthians 5:2, 4-5, 11-13; 2 Corinthians 2:5-7; 13:2, 10; Galatians 6:1; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-15; 1 Timothy 1:19-20; 5:1-2; 5:19-20; 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:10-13; 3:10-11; 2 John 9-11; Jude 22-23). In other words, inclusion in the church is simultaneous with becoming a Christ-follower, acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord and placing one's faith in Him. Fellowship must be broken, however, if one abandons true doctrine and godly living.

In Corinthians, factions and ungodly living plagued the church. Paul dealt with their problems by reminding them that the basis for being a Christian is receiving the grace of the Lord Jesus. He then reminded them that their unity with the Lord Jesus yielded the mandate to be unified with one another. The Holy Spirit who sealed them in Jesus also united them with one another, thus making it possible for them to live together as the church.

### A Moment for Reflection

Each congregation and denomination needs to assess its basis for inclusion into their fellowship. "Open enrollment" is not the method or means for growing the body of Christ. Evangelism is the means for growing the church, and evangelism assumes conversion to Christ as the basis for inclusion into the body. We must never forget that inclusion into the body of Christ is based upon the relationship of each person with the Person of Christ, and we are all members of the body of Christ by virtue of our personal commitment to Him. For Christians to deny full rights and privileges to believers by forbidding full involvement in the body and its functions is to basically declare there are two classes of Christians—member and non-member. That idea Scripture roundly condemns.

"I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10). †

**Rodney Nelson** is Academic Counselor and teacher at Liberty Christian School in Richland, Washington. He is married with two daughters. He enjoys writing, reading, and basketball. Rodney and his family currently attend the Richland Church of the Nazarene. Rodney left the Adventist church in 1984.





# I am grateful to God

GREG TAYLOR

**Y**esterday, April 6, 2008, was a milestone for our family. I was officially ordained as a minister in the Brethren In Christ cluster of churches. My ordination took place in the church where I serve as senior pastor in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, with my wife Paula and our two sons. I have been serving as a licensed minister in this system since 2002, but yesterday was my official ordination. This event was truly a time of celebration for us as we feel we have come full circle. Our hearts were filled with gratitude for God's wonderful care for us and for His direction in our lives. As I was reflecting this morning on God's amazing grace and continued leadership, I put together a gratitude list.

#### **I am grateful to God for:**

- My family of origin who had a heart for the things of God and taught me to take seriously eternal matters.
- My attendance at Adventist schools where I learned good ethical conduct and an appreciation of God's word.
- God who sought me out when I was in rebellion and sin and saved me by his amazing grace.
- His deliverance from my addictions that were destroying me and would certainly have killed me.
- The chance to go to college and seminary where God gave me a couple of key professors who taught me grace and a deeper appreciation of the word of God.
- My professors' challenge to me to be a man of God's word and to formulate my understanding of God through the Bible and the Bible alone.

- A godly wife whom I met at Andrews University who has stood by my side and always challenged me to be a man who seeks God's heart.
- The chance to serve as a pastor in the Adventist church for 20 years (18 full time) and to be used by God to share the message of God's grace, that I had failed to grasp as a child, within the context of various church assignments.
- The heart stirring that came the day God opened my eyes to the message of the book of Galatians. I can remember so vividly that season when the truth of the new covenant began to dawn on me. Galatians chapters 3-5 especially were like water to my soul.
- Passages of scripture like Romans 14:5-6, Ephesians 2, Colossians 2, 2 Corinthians 3, Hebrews 3, 4, and 8 that came alive with the clarity of God's Spirit teaching me and helping me grasp the mystery that had been hidden from my eyes for so long, the mystery that I had never understood in my years of scriptural training.
- The conviction that came over my wife and me as we began to understand the implication of the new covenant.

#### **I am also grateful for:**

- The intense fears we experienced as we struggled with things we had been taught from the writings of Ellen White that were clearly contradicting the teaching of the new covenant Scriptures in the New Testament. These fears drove us to our knees in a season of soul searching.
- The hours of agonizing struggle, the tears, the seeking after



the heart of God that eventually yielded the courage we needed to obey the Gospel.

- The Former Adventist Fellowship forum ([www.FormerAdventist.com](http://www.FormerAdventist.com)) that provided a safe place for us to find fellowship and prayer during our struggle with what might happen to us should God lead us to step out of Adventism. It was a lonely time because we wanted to make sure we were hearing God correctly, and it would have been irresponsible for us to share the struggles we were having regarding Adventist theology with our congregation until we were absolutely sure God was leading us. The forum gave us a place to ask for prayer without revealing our identity at that time. It was so nice to have people praying for us, people who had been over the same road, who didn't even know us, as we sought God's heart and plan for our lives.
- The difficulty of resigning from the ministry in the Adventist church, the church that we loved and served all those years; a church that had been good to us.
- The friends and family that lost respect for us because they could not understand why we were stepping away. Our deep sadness over these losses caused the comfort of Jesus to be even sweeter.
- The difficult days when it seemed we had few friends, when we were criticized deeply and publicly for our stand, for the unkind letters and emails, and most painful, the avoidance we experienced from our former church members and friends. We knew their pulling away was not meanness—it was fear. They thought we were deceived, and if we could be deceived—if pastors could be drawn away from the “truth”—then how could they stay safe? So they avoided us. It hurt, but the presence of Jesus was so abundant in those days. The Comforter was ever with us, and we felt the fellowship of the sufferings of Jesus—truly an honor and a privilege.
- The little independent Vineyard church that adopted us when we had no church family. They loved us, prayed for us, and taught us to pray in a deeper way than we had ever prayed before. We learned so much from that little church. They were truly the arms of Christ to us, embracing us and teaching us so much about the heart of the Father.
- The many months without employment during which we saw first-hand how God supernaturally takes care of His own. We were on a crash course to understanding what faith really is.
- The first church we served outside of Adventism. It was a recent church plant with all the financial challenges associ-

ated with that type of project. There was little secretarial help and other assistance I was used to, and I was an associate pastor learning a whole new system. I was starting all over again. It was not easy. But God grew us in that time of obscurity and taught us things we would have never learned in any other way. We became people learning to walk every day by faith.

- The months after our contract with that church was over before we started in our current church. For the struggle of selling a house in a time of market downturn, for the waiting, trusting, listening, believing, being fed as Elijah was with bite-sized portions—and always there was enough to pay the bills and to see how God tenderly cares for His own.
- The beautiful church family we now serve. For the people God allows us to touch for His kingdom. For a chance to lead in a church that is prayer-saturated, Spirit-filled, dedicated to God's word, and sold out to reaching people for Christ. For this we are so grateful.
- For the opportunity God has given us to serve others who are dealing with the implications of the new covenant. We have had the honor of helping scores of people process through the discovery of the Gospel and what it meant for their lives.
- For the chance to help pastors in Africa as they have stepped out in faith. We have seen two of these men connect with other Christian ministries and two others plant independent, new covenant churches. We are grateful.

Sometimes we hear our critics say things like, “They only did this because they were looking for the easier way.” We laugh to ourselves because we know how far that is from the truth. Yet ours is a path for which we are very thankful because we have seen the hand of God, felt His touch, seen His amazing grace, and experienced His constant provision like we had never experienced it before. And we are so grateful.

Recently we were talking with our teenaged boys and reflecting on God's hand in our lives. They told us that they were so grateful we followed God. They both love the Lord, they have a faith that is growing and maturing. They deal with the teenage struggles, but they told us “Mom and Dad, we are so grateful you followed God. We are afraid of what might have happened if we had chosen to stay comfortable instead of following God and his word.” To have two boys who are saved and growing up in the Lord—we are so grateful.

May His name be praised! †

**Greg Taylor** is founder and director of One Flock Ministries, a ministry dedicated to bringing unity among true Bible believing Christians. He is also the senior pastor of Hempfield Brethren In Christ Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Greg authored the book *Discovering the New Covenant: Why I am No Longer a Seventh-day Adventist* in which he tells how the incredible message of Galatians and other New Testament Epistles brought him to the conviction that he could no longer teach what was necessary to remain a pastor in the church he loved. Pastor Taylor, his wife Paula, and two teenage sons, Jordan and Matthew, live in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Left to right: Matthew, Greg, Paula, Jordan Taylor.



**Ratzlaff on the atonement**

I just finished reading your article on the Atonement in *Proclamation!* Very well done! Thanks for the careful exegesis and clear exposition. I know you'll get the usual brickbats from the "true believers", but someone out there needed to read exactly what you wrote.

CORINTH, TX

**Truly set free**

It's been a year ago since we exchanged e-mails. I have done much searching of the Bible, and God has used *Proclamation!* and my pastor to explain so many things about the Sabbath and other issues. He did several weeks of sermons over Galatians (comparing it with other books of the Bible). I never told him I was raised an Adventist, so it was definitely a "God thing".

I also just recently ordered [several books], and I am truly set free as of two days ago after reading *White Washed* [by Sydney Cleveland] and *Discovering the New Covenant* [by Greg Taylor]. I was 90% convinced before that, but I still did not feel 100% sure until I read those two books. When I SAW the discrepancies in [Ellen White's] writings versus what the Bible actually said and understood the whole mess with 1844 and her other prophecies, I no longer have any doubt at all that she is a false prophet used by Satan.

My family are all Adventists, and right now there is NO way to talk to them about it, but I am praying for the Holy Spirit to open their hearts and minds to the truth...

I felt that God wasn't leading me to stay in that church... I never saw love or compassion or felt the presence of the Holy Spirit, but my family kept making me feel so guilty that it was hard to break away. I got down on my knees and cried and cried and begged God to lead me back to the Adventist church so my family could go to heaven, but instead He showed me the real truth.

You had sent my sister, who lived with us for a

while, a copy of *Proclamation!* I couldn't give it to her because she wasn't living there anymore, so I looked at it. I saw what it was and decided immediately to toss the lying thing in the trash when God told me, "No, you need to read it." So I did... I read every article, and some I read twice. (I know my getting it was no accident). That's when I started questioning everything. God has used you and my pastor to give me my freedom in Christ. I'm forever grateful.

I am thankful for you and all of your loving work. I would also like to be put on the mailing list for *Proclamation!* It's easier for me to understand what I'm reading when I actually have it in my hands... I know it has to be hard when you hear from those who call you liars and tell you to take them off of your mailing list and say mean things. But I am one that now knows that you speak the truth, and the truth has set me free. So much love and gratitude!!

SOUTH HAVEN, KS

**See you when you burn**

You keep this *Proclamation!* rubbish away from me. I don't want no Sunday believers around me. You people are under the devil himself. Goodbye—good riddance—and I'll see you when you burn. Bye.

VOICEMAIL MESSAGE

**Obelisk on White grave**

In the 30 years of being an Adventist and over the past 20 years of being a Christian I have heard many theological discussions about Adventist doctrine. However, I have never heard anyone question why this propheticess of God, Ellen G. White, has an obelisk on her gravesite.

I can know what clothes to wear, what to eat, why not to ride a bicycle, the perils of Sunday worship, etc. But where, exactly is the "lesser light" on this subject [of the obelisk]?

Another great *Proclamation!* Praise God He chose us through the Son to reveal Himself to us by His Holy Spirit instead of by a religion of "the books."

SNOHOMISH, WA

**Peace I always wanted**

In "What is the Meaning of the Cross?" Dale Ratzlaff illuminated several errors with SDA theology in one significant article. The truths concerning the nature of Christ, the completion of the atonement at the cross, the gift of justification by His grace apart from law, the scapegoat representation of Christ our sin bearer and many other salient points were properly presented. I also appreciated his interpretation of Rom 5:18-19 "...the many will be made righteous."

Your articles are such a blessing to all of those who enter a period of crisis when discovering

major problems within their "remnant" church. What a reassurance it is to know that one is not alone in what they are discovering in God's word. Your magazine has helped to clarify difficult topics of study, validate my personal findings, and bring comfort in my journey out of Adventism. The peace that I now experience every day is what I have always wanted but could somehow never attain before discovering the errors in my belief system.

This is to thank you for being patient with me and sending me your thought-provoking magazine even though as of now you have received nothing in return. This will soon be rectified. Please keep the information out there and available for others to find. With hearts open to the Holy Spirit and the correct information in hand, lives are changed.

CALHOUN, GA

**Before it's too late**

The devil is a deceiver - Rev. 12:9. You are deceived by him but there is still hope for you. Please yield yourself completely to Jesus, and by His power, recover yourself out of Satan's snare—II Timothy 2:26—so it can be said of you, "Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?" (Zechariah 3:2) before IT'S TOO LATE!

VIA EMAIL

**Back to Bible Study**

Thank you so much for your magazine. It has led me back to studying what the Bible has to say. I left the SDA church and joined a wonderful local Christian church but still believed many of the teachings I had learned were truly "biblical." I had learned all the texts in school. I am now learning new info and love it. I was wondering if you could write an article on the state of the dead.

VIA EMAIL

**Editor's Response:** We plan to address the human spirit in the next issue of *Proclamation!*

**Live like the heathen**

"All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

I have read enough of your publication *Proclamation!* to know no one in your following wants to suffer in any way and therefore they are willing to turn the truth around in such a way to fit their own "itching ears" and allow them to live and do as they please.

This is just a way, an excuse to wear the make-up and jewelry they've always wanted to wear, to dress casually when preaching, and most of all to do as they please on the Sabbath. Just like the Israelites who got tired of following the dictates of God and chose to be like and live like the heathen around them. How sad!

**LIFE ASSURANCE MINISTRIES****MISSION**

To proclaim the good news of the new covenant gospel of grace in Christ and to combat the errors of legalism and false religion.

**MOTTO**

Truth needs no other foundation than honest investigation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a willingness to follow truth when it is revealed.

**MESSAGE**

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast." Ephesians 2:8,9



All I can do is feel sorrow for each of you and pray you have not shut out the leading of the Holy Spirit to the point of no return, At this point you are all headed down the wrong road.

With that said, please take us off your mailing list. We don't appreciate receiving a magazine that so obviously twists the Truth.

Praying you'll see the light,  
WOLF POINT, MT

#### No interest at all

Please take me off your mailing list. I have no interest at all in your *Proclamation!* magazine. You seem to be very confused and contradictory in the way you choose to interpret God's holy word (The Bible). May God lead you into "all truth".

You have a wrong spirit in you. I am praying that you stop hating the truth as it is in God's word.

WOODRUFF, WI

#### Why Desmond Ford?

Why did you publish an article by Desmond Ford (see January/February, 2008) when he is still a sabbatarian? I've had several Adventists ask me why I won't keep the Sabbath when *Proclamation!* is publishing the work of a sabbatarian.

**Editor's response:** We published Des Ford's article on the faulty hermeneutics that gave rise to the doctrine of the investigative judgment because he knows the doctrine intimately and is also expert in the original biblical languages. His research is detailed, and he can explain definitively why the doctrine is not biblical. The fact that he remains a sabbatarian does not diminish his scholarship.

Further, Romans 14 states that we must not divide fellowship with true brothers and sisters in Christ over the observance of a day. Des does not believe the Sabbath is the seal of God (or even the "sign of the seal"), and his sabbatarianism is a matter for his own conscience.

We at *Proclamation!*, however, do believe that most of us who have kept the Sabbath because we believed it was God's requirement for those who will be saved must come to the place of trusting the Lord Jesus alone for our salvation. If we confess Jesus as our Lord but hedge our bets by clinging to the Sabbath, we never know for sure whether Jesus alone is enough. Clinging to the Sabbath out of deep fear that giving it up could cost us eternal life is to treat the Sabbath as a holy object—an idol. God asks us to surrender to Him everything outside of Himself that holds a hallowed place in our hearts. He alone is holy.

#### Wondering if you'll kill me

Just wondering if your group is familiar with the *Great Controversy*. If those events take place, will that impact your beliefs at all—for example, a Catholic oriented one-world government requiring Sunday worship? Just wondering if you'll be trying to kill me if I decide to keep the Sabbath.

Cheers!  
VIA EMAIL

#### Thank you, Dale

As a former teacher [at two Adventist colleges] for 13 years, my gifts were not in the theological arena per se. Having two brothers still deeply entrenched in Adventism and knowing nobody in the church had the burden on their heart for their salvation as I did, God laid it upon my heart to try and reach them with the gospel as you said. We have been corresponding almost weekly now for two years, and God has given me the boldness and knowledge of His truth I have never known before to show them that the

Just wondering if you'll be trying to kill me if I decide to keep the Sabbath.

"Narrow Road" labeled Heaven will not be there for those who desire both EGW and Jesus to lead them.

First of all, I want to thank you, Dale, and Carolyn and the Tinkers (and all others in *Proclamation!* ministry), for your love and ministry to us former Adventists who, in the beginning, had no forum or voice to turn to. I also want you to know we are all praying for your health and strength to remain faithful to His call to spread the GREAT NEWS of His gospel! Your spiritual strength will last forever while the physical is ever so temporary for all of us.

You are an inspiration and blessing to all of us!  
HUDSON, WI

#### You will not be saved

I am requesting urgently, that you immediately—I mean immediately—take me off your mailing list. I'm not sure what made you think that I would want this paper that is coming to my home. The disdain I feel every time this trash comes to our mailbox—take it away now, please. I don't need this. This is something that is very displeasing to me. If you continue sending me this I

will send it back at your expense. Do you get the picture? Why did you think a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, an Adventist teacher, would want this? I read the first article in the first order I received and asked my husband where this comes from. You do realize you will not be saved—because you know the truth. I do repeat, do not send me one more because you are wasting your time and money.

VIA EMAIL

#### Demon-possessed first-day Christians

Your theology is shot through with errors, but rest easy; you will not be exposed until the final crisis is upon us. A case in point: the hatred of Jesus by the Jewish leaders really didn't gain exposure until Jesus was arrested and brought to trial. Then it all came out...

The Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians and Catholics had a shot at enforcing their Sunday law in my home-town a few years ago, and we were plunged into a witch-hunt that looked like we

were living in 14th century Europe. They arrested women having garage sales on Sunday, children mowing lawns, sales clerks, and you name it. All in the name of Sunday-sacredness spearheaded by first day Christian that didn't know the first thing about "grace" much less Christian charity and fairness. I don't have time to share with you how we got it stopped.

You think being in bed with first day Christians is all peaches and cream, but you're gonna find out they are

demon-possessed when given half a chance to enforce their false theology with the power of the state... Everything the Spirit of Prophecy said would happen is happening right in front of our eyes. How blind and stupid can someone be not to see it. Sleep on, dear friend, and it's going to overtake you like a thief in the night.

Just thought you ought to know.  
SOUTH CENTRAL, KY

#### Value Quality

You are to be thanked and put on notice [that] the laity does read the inserts [included with the receipts] and, most of all, the *Proclamation!* publication. The value and quality of your writings is greatly appreciated... Thank you for your care.

PALOS VERDES PENINSULA, CA

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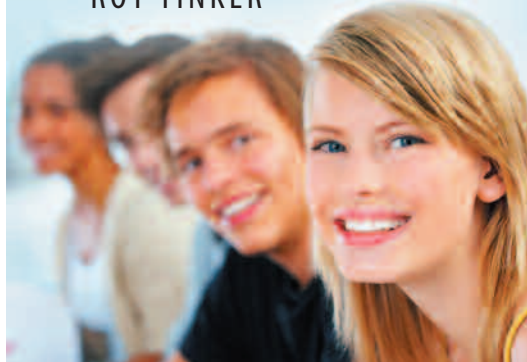
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# Fighting for Joy in Jesus

**A small-group leader's letter of encouragement to his group**

ROY TINKER



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I really enjoyed our time together tonight. Some of us stayed afterwards for an impromptu praise and worship time, and it was really refreshing.

The last two weeks of daily life have been really difficult for me. Sometimes I think discouragement comes as a result of sin; other times, it's because of difficult circumstances or tough situations we're in. I think many times the enemy is behind the discouragement, using sin or situations or people we know or weaknesses in us as a springboard to discouragement. I think that's been the case with me.

Several of you have said you're dealing with discouragement. We need to fight for joy in these times—the "good fight of the faith." How do we do all that?

A great starting point is simply praising Jesus. Praising Him is a great way to fight for joy and totally blast away the enemy's power. When we feel discouraged, it may seem a little crazy to praise God because we don't feel like it. But do it anyway!

How do we praise God when we're feeling down?

As the Psalms say, we need to remind ourselves of God's goodness and faithfulness. The author of Psalm 42 does it like this:

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."

One aspect of spiritual maturity is learning to talk to ourselves rather than listening to ourselves. Talking to ourselves goes something like this: "Soul, I know you're discouraged and down and tired. But God is your hope. Jesus is your Saviour! There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!" If we have scripture in our minds, we can actively talk to ourselves and fight the fear and doubt and darkness.



**Roy Tinker** is a computer programmer at Environmental Systems Research Institute in Redlands, California. He is a keyboardist with the worship teams at Trinity Church in Redlands, California, and leads a weekly "twenty-somethings" Bible study in his home.

Psalm 103 is one of my favorites. It begins,

"Praise the Lord, oh my soul. All my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, oh my soul, and forget not all his benefits — who forgives all your sins, heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion.... who satisfies your desires with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's."

Sometimes we need to convince ourselves to praise God.

And then, just praise Him! I discovered recently what a dramatic difference it makes when I make a con-

scious effort to praise God. I am grateful for the privilege of an office door that closes, so I can turn on praise music and sing while I work (when I'm not immersed in problem-solving on the job).

Sometimes the darkness does not lift, but other things also help. Probably the most helpful resource is the body of Christ. Let's love one another, for love comes from God. God has given us one another. By opening up to other Christians and fellowshiping and praying and loving one another, we build each other up and fulfill Jesus' command to us.

What if nothing seems to work?

God has promised always to reward those who seek Him. Wait for Him. He is sovereign and in charge. If His joy tarries, continue to seek Him and surrender to Him and rest in Him. He sometimes brings us through periods of darkness to strengthen our faith, so praise Him for the dark times, too.

Ask Him to show you what you need to know. That's a prayer He definitely answers. I recently needed to surrender control to him; I sometimes am perfectionistic, and that attitude quenches the Holy Spirit.

May Jesus' mighty love guard your hearts and minds as you cast your anxiety on Him. May God lead your hearts into His love. And may we encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today!

†

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