BEYOND TODAY

Envisioning a Better World Tomorrow

POSTING THE TEN COMMANDMENTS
A LAW FOR THE FUTURE



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Map to Our Ultimate Future

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September – October 2024

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The Biggest Shake-Up Is Yet Ahead

There have been major shake-ups in the news since our last issue. The most shocking seems to have been washed away by other coverage—the horrifying attempt to assassinate former U.S. President and current presidential candidate Donald Trump at a campaign rally (addressed in our Current Events & Trends section).

The bullet missing by a sudden turn of the head is seen by many, including Trump himself, as a miraculous protection from God. Had it struck and killed him, the country would likely be in a dire situation, with possibly violence and uprisings following.

This event came in the wake of the terrible performance of President Joe Biden in a presidential debate against Trump. All of a sudden, mainstream media pundits were decrying his mental acuity and stamina—as if this had never been witnessed before. Then came calls from his own party for him to step down from seeking reelection. The concern was not to remove him from office as effectively incapacitated, but that he would lose the coming election. Pressure mounted from party bigwigs for him to bow out of the race, and he eventually did, endorsing his vice president, Kamala Harris, as a replacement candidate. Her favorability rating in polling had been very low—but many in the news media went into full swing to reform her image.

This shake-up was surprising but not totally unforeseen. For some behind-the-scenes insight here, I'll note that our last magazine cover with the Trump-Biden face-off was selected for that issue rather than waiting until the next issue closer to the election because we thought there was a reasonable chance the candidates might change before the next issue.

But now what? As of this writing in early August, the Democratic convention is yet to happen. It seems Kamala Harris has it locked up, but we'll have to wait to be sure. There could be more surprises. We should know by the time you're receiving this issue.

Why should we care about this? The fact is, who our political leaders are is an important matter—as our and many other people's lives and livelihoods are affected by the decisions they make. And U.S. national politics significantly impact the world. Of course, while we should be concerned, we should not be consumed. For our political leaders are not where true security, prosperity and the answers to our problems lie.

The real answers are with God and His ways—His laws, His truth, and staying close to Him. Our cover story discusses moves by some state governments to post the Ten Commandments and teach the Bible in schools. It's wonderful to see such acknowledgment of biblical laws, but as explained in the article that's not enough. The world needs to change. It's upside down. In other articles, we tackle the deceptions of Satan, as he and his demons seek to draw us into a make-believe paradise redefining not just morality but our very existence. This year's Olympics in France opened with a hideous drag celebration that many saw as mocking Christianity.

The year may see more shake-ups—with more to follow. We live in uncertain times. Yet it's certain that at some point the world will be horribly shaken and plunged into worsening darkness with the rise of tyrannical powers and terrible world war and devastation.

But then, thankfully, the world will utterly change—in the greatest shake-up ever. As our article on the biblical fall festivals shows, we're preparing for something much greater than the next presidential term. We're preparing for the return of Jesus Christ to take over the reins of government of this world, to establish the law of God throughout the earth, to proclaim His truth to all nations, to lead the way to redemption, and to save the world.

There will be no more celebration of immorality and gender confusion. There will be no more wars, no more assassination attempts. There will be no more poverty and incurable diseases. There will be no more despair. The world will not live by lies, but by the Truth.

As Jesus said, we must repent and believe this good news (Mark 1:14-15). And in that regard, you don't even need to wait. If God is calling you by this message, you can be free today. You can change. You can experience a measure of that future world in your life now.

Read the articles in this issue. See what God is doing as the world plunges further into confusion. Embrace God's plan. Learn to live by His will.

We don't know all the shocking twists and turns that will confront us in the weeks and months to come. But we do know the general direction, and we know where the world is headed thanks to God's revelation—the revelation of the greatest shake-up that will give us the Kingdom of God.

And that is "a kingdom that *cannot* be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28, emphasis added).

Let's acknowledge that in observing God's fall festivals, and be thankful for His guidance through the turbulence of these times to the brighter tomorrow of the Kingdom that will endure.



Tom Robinson, Associate Editor
Beyond Today Magazine

Can You *Change the World?*

Our May-June 2024 issue looked at how we can respond to the numerous problems facing the world, offering a vision of hope in God's rescue as we strive to live God's way today.

"Three Keys to Knowing God" by Darris McNeely

Cease and desist! I want *no more* literature or false teachings from people that *do not* believe in the Trinity of God.

Former subscriber in Colorado

We're sorry to see you go! We received other letters in response to our stance on this article in the May-June 2024 issue. The Bible presents God as two divine Beings—God the Father and Jesus Christ, the latter referred to in John 1 as the preexistent Word through whom all things were created. The Holy Spirit is not a third distinct being but is, rather, the shared divine power, life, mind, essence and projected presence of the Father and Christ through which They live within believers, giving us spiritual life. For scriptural proof of all this, we encourage you to request or download our free study guide Is God a Trinity?, *which you can find at ucg.org/so24. It answers a lot of questions you might have.*

More letters about our magazine, video and other free resources

I would like to personally say "many thanks" for being able to get your study aids at no cost to me. I am a 74-year-old disabled veteran Navy corpsman. So far, I've read eight of your study aids. What has impressed me is that your church seems to be more like the original Scriptures than any other church group I have studied. I tried to find the nearest church to me on your website. I would really appreciate it if someone from your church would contact me. I am seriously considering becoming a member. Somehow, I was given my first issue of *Beyond Today* and I subscribed. Then I found your wonderful booklets. So full of the Scriptures! So thank you very much, future brethren! I am looking forward to hearing from your church.

From the Internet

My niece in Lusaka [in Zambia] is very keen on receiving some of your study aids. Over the last few months, she has asked many, many questions concerning the Sabbath, angels, the nature of God, etc. Can you please send her your study aids on those topics (which she is looking forward to receiving)?

From the Internet

Thank you for sending me a sample copy of *Beyond Today* magazine and study aids. I have not stopped reading them since I received them, and have shared with my wife the truths I learned from them. Since I've been incarcerated, I prayed to God for forgiveness and have asked for His Holy Spirit to help me repent of my sins and get closer to Him, as I continue reading and meditating on His words. When I finish my time here by 2027, I will donate all these study aids to the library so there can be access to these irrefutable truths. My prayer to God is that He continues pouring His blessings on your ministry as you continue helping people like me in search of the true understanding of God's teachings in the Bible.

Incarcerated reader in Australia

I saw your programs in the Edovo platform [a correctional resource platform available in prisons] on the electronic tablet issued to us. I thank God for the sermons, and that I can have tools to serve Him correctly. The *Beyond Today* TV episode "You Become What You Think" by Gary Petty helps me to become a better person with regards to my inner being. It's helped me strive for my thoughts to become acceptable before God as I try to avoid sinning, with the Holy Spirit's help. I pray to have the virtues of a Christian.

Incarcerated viewer

I just ordered the free Bible study and magazine. I just want to say thank you for these actually being free; I didn't have to give you a credit card number. On anything that's offered "free" but tries to charge at the end of the sign-up process, I exit right away, and frankly it makes me not believe in much of anything.

From the Internet

I just wanted to say thanks to pastor Gary Petty for his *Beyond Today* television episode "Is Anger Destroying Your Life?" That message came at the right time for me. I listen to it often, and I keep the key points on note cards at work. Thanks to all of you.

Viewer in Michigan

I would like to request your study guide *Why Were You Born?* I was a premature baby, presumed dead at birth, but revived by the family doctor. The doctor hired a nanny (Harriet) to care for me, as it appeared that my mother was not going to; I was the baby of four children. Harriet cared for me until I was about eight years old. I never felt love from my mother. Love came from neighbors. Perhaps your study guide will answer the questions I have always asked myself. I feel so at ease when I read your publications. They are so informative.

From the Internet

Grateful reader sending donation

Thank you for the free literature. It helps me understand what is going on around the world and the prophecies mentioned in the Holy Bible. Thank you for your great work. God bless you all.

Subscriber in Canada

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POSTING THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

A LAW FOR THE FUTURE



New moves to post the Ten Commandments and teach the Bible in schools have met with strong opposition. Will such antipathy continue? Or is a time coming, beyond today's politics, when all people will deeply respect and obey the Ten Commandments and all of Scripture?

by John LaBissoniere

The Ten Commandments are an ancient law of the Bible, having been delivered to the Israelites around 3,500 years ago. Yet they are a point of contention in U.S. politics today, as some seek acknowledgment of their influence on the nation from its inception, while others want them dismissed.

God commanded that His laws be taught and even posted on the Israelites' doorframes and gates so that they would be regularly seen and ingrained in people's thinking (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). So it's honorable to give them place in our educational institutions—and in fact they long had such place. But legal challenges eventually arose based on the notion of the "separation of church and state" supposedly enshrined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution—though such wording is not found there.

On Nov. 17, 1980, following a series of negations of religious expression in government-sponsored enterprises, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled by a slim (5-4) majority that a Kentucky statute requiring school officials to display a copy of the Ten Commandments in every public school classroom was unconstitutional.

But the issue is now back, especially with Louisiana Republican Gov. Jeff Landry signing a bill into law requiring

all state public school classrooms to display the Ten Commandments in frames or as posters no smaller than 11-by-14 inches. The statute also requires a four-paragraph statement of context showing how the Ten Commandments have historical significance to American foundational documents.

Besides a sincere desire to educate young people about the Ten Commandments, it seems part of the reason for the legal effort at this time is due to the shift of the Supreme Court to a 6-3 conservative majority—one that recently overturned the *Roe v. Wade* abortion ruling, allowing each state to decide that matter. Could a similar ruling follow with the commandments posting?

Opposition to the Louisiana law came immediately, with a judicial stay request filed in local court by the American Civil Liberties Union and a multifaith group of nine Louisiana families with children in public schools, as well as the Freedom From Religion Foundation and Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

In a related development, Oklahoma State Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters announced on June 27, 2024 that all Oklahoma schools are required to incorporate the Bible and the Ten Commandments in their curriculums. He specified that "the Bible is one of the most foundational documents used for the Constitution and the birth of our country." He also wrote that "the Bible is a necessary historical document to teach our kids about the history of this country, to have a complete understanding of Western civilization, [and] to have an understanding of the basis of our legal system."

Supt. Walters' directive was met with resistance, including from Interfaith Alliance, a national organization claiming to protect religious freedoms. It stated: "This is blatant religious coercion that should have absolutely no place in public schools in Oklahoma or any other state. True religious freedom means ensuring that no one religious group is allowed to impose their viewpoint on all Americans. The vast majority of people of faith in this country reject these dangerous, intimidating efforts to force a Christian nationalist agenda into our schools, our courts and our government."

Yet that's revisionist history at work. What's truly dangerous is the effort to marginalize the laws of God from public life. Where is that leading? And will such opposition to posting the Ten Commandments never cease? Or is a day coming when the whole world will come to acknowledge and live by these divine laws and the entirety of God's Word?

> The Bible shows that God will bring judgment on the nations for their flagrant disobedience of His laws. The world as a whole stands in deep trouble. Yet God calls on all to repent and change.

A heritage of respect for God and the Bible

Other states have also recently attempted to pass laws requiring public schools to display the Ten Commandments in classrooms. A 2023 bill in Texas failed to become law, while a similar bill in Utah passed in 2024 after being watered down so that the Ten Commandments could only be placed on a list of optional historical documents for study that teachers of American history and government could use.

As noted above, various legal and religious organizations are alarmed that posting the Ten Commandments or teaching the Bible in public schools is a dire blending of "church and state" detrimental for the nation and its citizens. But that was certainly not the viewpoint of the nation's Founding Fathers and early presidents, who frequently included numerous references to God, the Bible and the commandments in their statements and writings.

The American Declaration of Independence of 1776, which was signed by 56 courageous Founding Fathers, states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are *endowed by their Creator* with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" (emphasis added throughout). And it appeals to *"the Supreme Judge of the world* for the rectitude of our intentions . . . with a firm reliance on the protection of *divine Providence."*

George Washington, president of the Constitutional Convention and first president of the United States, stated in his first inaugural address in 1789: "No people can be bound to *acknowledge and adore the invisible hand,* which conducts the affairs of men more than the people of the United States. Every step, by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation, seems to have been distinguished by some token of *providential agency.*"

James Madison, "father of the Constitution" and the nation's fourth president, stated in 1785, "Before any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe."

James Wilson, a U.S. Supreme Court justice and signer of the Declaration of Independence, noted, *"Human law*

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must rest its authority ultimately upon the authority of that law which is Divine."

Andrew Jackson, the seventh U.S. president, said, "The *Bible is the rock on which our republic rests.*"

Even before the establishment of the United States as an independent nation, 12 of the 13 original American colonies *incorporated all Ten Commandments into their own civil code of laws*. This indicates tremendous respect and honor toward the words of Holy Scripture as an indispensable element in wise and upright governance.

So it should be clear that the Founding Fathers did not believe in a separation between religion and public life and never intended that America's governing documents stand in an adversarial position toward the Bible and the Ten Commandments.

Consequences in turning away—but you can turn back

The political reality in American society today stands in stark contrast to the Framers' intent. Prior to the 1980 decision to ban displays of the Ten Commandments in public schools, the Supreme Court had ruled in 1962 that prayer in public schools was unconstitutional. Then in 1963 it declared that the Bible could no longer be read in public school classrooms. Since that time, neglect of and even antipathy toward religion have accelerated.

When people turn away from God and the Bible, what is the consequence? The prophet Hosea wrote, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6). This refers to biblical comprehension, which involves abiding by God's eternal, spiritual laws expressed in the Ten Commandments and other flawless statutes. Without the Creator's revealed knowledge, people flail around in needless ignorance—causing themselves and others great anguish and suffering (Isaiah 59:7).

It should be no surprise, then, that immoral and corrupt corollaries have arisen throughout society. This is seen in people's increasing appetites for sex outside of marriage, cohabitation, same-sex "marriage," transgenderism, pornography, violence, drug and alcohol addiction and other evils. Indeed, expelling God and His commandments from public and private life strikes at the very foundation of a successful and beneficent society.

Noah Webster, of *Webster's Dictionary* fame, often called the "Father of American Scholarship and Education," stated: "*The moral principles and precepts contained in the scriptures ought to form the basis of all our civil constitutions and laws*. All the miseries and evils which men suffer from vice, crime, ambition, injustice, oppression, slavery, and war, proceed from *their despising or neglecting the precepts contained in the Bible.*"



So true. And on top of self-inflicted consequences, the Bible also shows that God will bring judgment on the nations for their flagrant disobedience of His laws. The world as a whole stands in deep trouble. Yet God calls on all to repent and change.

Will America turn around and rediscover its roots of profound respect for the Bible and the Ten Commandments? Will other nations submit to God and His ways? While that's unlikely to happen in this age, *you don't have to go along with the crowd!* You can go to God in sincere repentance and willing obedience, receiving His profound loving mercy (Psalms 33:18-19; 86:5).

Furthermore, beyond today's world of trouble, confusion and suffering lies an electrifying period that will dawn for all humanity at Jesus Christ's second coming that will replace the hateful, adversarial and destructive behavior that now afflicts society everywhere.

A coming world of peace and great blessing

At that coming amazing time, Christ will install God's righteous government—the Kingdom of God on earth, in which His followers of this age will reign with Him over the nations, commencing with a thousand-year period of righteousness and peace (Daniel 2:44; 7:27; Revelation 5:10; 11:15; 20:4-6).

God's law will go forth from Jerusalem, the seat of Christ's reign, and people will cease from war and all harm, as all come to know God and His ways (Isaiah 2:2-4; 11:1-9). At that awesome time "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk

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2:14). And unlike today, everyone will fully respect and obey the Ten Commandments. Starting with the people of Israel, the Eternal says, "I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (Hebrews 8:10; see Jeremiah 31:31-34).

All of this will be possible as people the world over will receive the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit (Joel 2:28). Again, starting with Israel, God says: "I will give you a *new heart and put a new spirit* within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them" (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

So not only will the Ten Commandments be posted in public, but they will be written into people's hearts and minds! God's laws and all Scripture will be the basis for education throughout the world—and through the Spirit will be internalized.

Just imagine a world where everyone lived by the Ten Commandments and the other laws of Scripture. One of America's Founders did that. John Adams, the nation's first vice president and its second president, wrote: "Suppose a nation in some distant Region, should take the Bible for their only law Book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there exhibited. Every member would be obliged in conscience to temperance and frugality and industry [or productivity], to justice and kindness and charity towards his fellow men, and to piety and love, and reverence towards Almighty God.

"In this commonwealth, no man would impair his health by gluttony, drunkenness, or lust . . . No man would steal or lie or any way defraud his neighbour, but would live in peace and good will with all men—no man would blaspheme his maker or profane his worship, but a rational and manly, a sincere and unaffected piety and devotion, would reign in all hearts. What a Eutopia, what a paradise would this region be" (*Diary,* Feb. 22, 1756).

> At that coming amazing time, Christ will install God's righteous government—the Kingdom of God on earth. God's laws and all Scripture will be the basis for education throughout the world—and through the Spirit will be internalized.

This wonderful dream will be realized in the Kingdom of God—as all are led into repentance and heartfelt obedience. Harmony will then fill the world (Psalm 96:3; Acts 15:7; 2 Timothy 4:17). Not only will Jesus Christ make it possible for people to live in peace, safety and enjoy great physical abundance, but He will give them indispensable spiritual, moral and ethical guidance and instruction. Assisting Christ in this crucial task will be God's resurrected, faithful and wise divine sons and daughters from this age who will serve as teachers, administrators, judges and leaders (2 Corinthians 6:18; Isaiah 30:20). They will diligently coach each person in God's way of life—in which the Ten Commandments are fundamental (Deuteronomy 10:4; Isaiah 30:21).

By obeying God's teachings, individuals and nations will have a solid foundation for cooperation as they work harmoniously in serving their Creator and one another. Indeed, "God blesses everyone who obeys his Law" (Proverbs 29:18, Contemporary English Version).

But again, you needn't wait until that time to enjoy the fruits of joy and peace in your life. You can turn to God in sincere repentance and obedience to the Ten Commandments today and experience a foretaste of His coming glorious Kingdom.

God even points the way to that future in the commandments. The Fourth Commandment, to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, is not only a reminder of God as Creator (Exodus 20:8-11) but as Deliverer from bondage (Deuteronomy 5:12-15). And the Sabbath at the end of the work week symbolizes the coming 1,000-year reign of Christ as a rest from the wearisome toil of this age (see Hebrews 3-4 and our free study guide *Sunset to Sunset: God's Sabbath Rest*).

The Kingdom age is also represented by the annual Feast of Tabernacles, another biblically commanded observance, which we will soon be celebrating in October. (Be sure to read "The Fall Festivals: Map to Our Ultimate Future" beginning on page 10.)

As we follow Christ's instruction to pray to God, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10), longing for the wonderful future ahead, let's strive with His help to live by the laws of that Kingdom today, experiencing the great blessings this will bring to us and others. BT

DIVE DEEPER



For more perspective on the Louisiana ruling, see our Biblical Worldview series video "Louisiana and the Ten Commandments: What Do You Think?" on YouTube. Also, to better understand these great fundamental laws of God in their spiritual intent, be sure to download or request our free study guide *The Ten Commandments.* And to learn more about Christ's coming reign, when the commandments will be the law of the whole world, also download or request our free study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom.* **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so24 to find them both.**



The Fall Festivals

Map to Our Ultimate Future

Maps show the way to your destination. The Bible lays out annual observances that point the way to human destiny. Doesn't it make good sense to plan your life's journey by learning how to read the genuine biblical map?

by Jerold Aust

Long before GPS and modern maps, people still needed directions and created representations of their place in the world. As John Noble Wilford wrote in *The Mapmakers:* "Before Europeans reached the Pacific, the Marshall Islanders were making stick charts. Sticks were lashed together with fibers to depict prevailing winds and wave patterns; shells or coral were inserted at the appropriate places to represent islands. When a Tahitian communicated his knowledge of South Pacific geography to Captain Cook by drawing a map, it was clear that he and his people were quite familiar with the map idea.

"Pre-Columbian maps in Mexico indicated roads by lines of footprints. Centuries ago Eskimos carved accurate coastal maps in ivory, the Incas built elaborate relief maps of stone and clay, and early Europeans drew sketch maps on their cave walls" (1981, p. 7).

Cartographers agree there is something fundamental about the map idea: "It is a basic form of human communication . . . Indeed, the term *map* is often used metaphorically to explain other types of knowing and communicating. In everyday conversation, the word *map* is used to convey the idea of clarification: someone maps out a plan or maps out his future" (p. 13).

Could there also be a map of sorts, a set of symbols in progression, to show us all where our lives are ultimately going? Yes, and it's found in the Bible—not just in its overall teachings but in a sequence of observances God has commanded, His annual feasts or festivals.

Sadly, mainstream Christianity has basically ignored the basic biblical map leading to salvation and "penciled in" traditional pagan symbols instead, such as substituting holidays like Christmas and Easter for God's revelatory Holy Days. When you misread a map, a miss is as good as a mile.

No wonder humankind has consistently run into biblical dead ends or taken frustrating and confusing religious detours—rather than following the road to eternal life. Let's briefly explore God's symbols, His annual festivals in the autumn that mark out and point the way to immortality in God's coming Kingdom.

Besides His weekly Sabbath, our Creator has revealed seven annual festivals starting in the spring, each one depicting some great event in the ongoing mapping of God's salvation for humankind. However, this particular article will focus on and highlight only the four festivals that occur in the late summer and autumn of the year (in the northern hemisphere).

Each represents a decisive turning point in human history. The previous three spring festivals of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread and Pentecost signify and represent personal responses to the workings of God in the people He calls and chooses during this age of man. The Bible calls them the firstfruits of God's salvation. (For a fuller discussion of all seven of these annual occasions, request or download our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.)

wragg via Getty

The Feast of Trumpets maps the arrival of Jesus Christ

The first autumn festival is the Feast of Trumpets. This biblical festival helps us understand why Jesus Christ must return and reveals how and what He will do when He arrives.

Our Creator has revealed seven annual festivals starting in the spring, each one depicting some great event in the ongoing mapping of God's salvation for humankind.

It also reveals what happens to His true followers, both those who are still alive and those who are "dead in Christ," at His coming. Both are transformed immediately to immortal children of God (1 Corinthians 15:22-23, 42-44, 50-53). Jesus gathers His elect (see 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17), who will afterward follow Christ when He descends on the Mount of Olives (Revelation 19:14; Zechariah 14:4).

When the Feast of Trumpets was revealed to God's nation Israel (Leviticus 23:24), trumpets were, as they still are, symbols indicating an alarm for war. Israel often blew trumpets to alert its army and regular population that battle was imminent. Consider the trumpets that were blown when God instructed Israel to conquer Jericho (Joshua 6). A blowing of trumpets signaled imminent battle.

The book of Revelation likewise shows blowing of trumpets in preparation for Jesus' return. The fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets is loudly sounded in Revelation chapters 8 through 11, where the seven trumpets of God warn of major cataclysmic events. These trumpet blasts serve as the prelude to the seven last plagues of Revelation 16.

The Feast of Trumpets symbolizes the return of Christ, the most pivotal and well-mapped-out event in all of human history. When Christians celebrate the Feast of Trumpets, they are in a sense acting out in advance a great symbol of their salvation. (If you would like to understand the significance of these biblical prophecies in much greater detail, request or download our free study guide *The Book of Revelation Unveiled*.)

The Day of Atonement maps Satan's removal

The Day of Atonement focuses on the future removal of the devil and his cohorts, powerful evil spirits unseen by the naked human eye, called demons. As agents of deception and baleful influence, they have been misleading mankind since the Garden of Eden (see Revelation 12:9).

The fact that many today doubt the existence of evil spirits demonstrates the success of the deception. (For the biblical proof, request or download our free study guide *Is There Really a Devil?*)

Many biblical passages reveal that Satan is intricately involved with humanity at large. Recall that when the devil offered Jesus Christ the kingdoms of the world, Jesus did not dispute his rule over mankind. "Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, *'All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me'"* (Matthew 4:8-9, emphasis added throughout).

The apostle Paul tells us that Satan is the god of this world and that he has blinded the minds of all humanity (2 Corinthians 4:4). He began his deception of mankind with our first parents, Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-6; Romans 5:14-15).

Thankfully Satan's destructive work will cease. Christ will remove the devil from the human realm for a thousand years at His return (Revelation 20:1-3; compare Romans 16:20). This major event is mapped out or symbolized by the Day of Atonement. Christians observe this unique biblical festival by fasting, drawing close to God and acknowledging their total reliance on Him (Leviticus 23:26-32; Acts 27:9).

The reason God is going to remove Satan and the demonic realm from the human sphere is very clear: They are at the heart of all human troubles, pain, suffering, war and death. Without the destroyer, peace can break out on the earth (Isaiah 14:4-7). Only then can humanity continue on the road to God's peace and prosperity.

The Day of Atonement keeps the path open for all humankind to experience the wonderful world tomorrow, the coming Kingdom of God! That time is symbolized by the joyous Feast of Tabernacles, the next stop on the road map to eternal life.

The Feast of Tabernacles maps universal peace and prosperity

The Feast of Tabernacles, a seven-day celebration, is strongly symbolic of the great destination for humanity on the road to universal peace and prosperity. Yet that destination cannot be reached before the previous ones. A specific and orderly sequence of benchmark events must take place for humankind to arrive safely at its ultimate destination. There are no shortcuts.

By way of a brief review, the Feast of Trumpets heralds the return of Jesus Christ, where He resurrects the dead in Christ and changes those Christians who are still alive (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17; 1 Corinthians 15), and begins to remove all tyrannical governments (Revelation 11:15-18).

The next destination in God's master plan of salvation is, as we saw, the Day of Atonement, where Christ removes Satan and incarcerates him (Revelation 20:1-3). Only then can peace break out on earth (Isaiah 14:7; 11:1-9). This leads to the next step as represented by the Feast of Tabernacles, when Jesus



will rule as King over all nations for 1,000 years.

Today Christ's disciples who understand the meaning of the symbols of God's step-by-step map of salvation observe the annual Feast of Tabernacles in anticipation of mankind's great future.

Throughout the earth, humanity will rejoice in unparalleled peace and prosperity. War, violence, deception, famines and all the other insoluble problems that plague mankind today will disappear (Isaiah 11:1-9; Micah 4:1-7). This war-weary earth will become a new Garden of Eden, beginning at Jerusalem and then spreading to all nations (Ezekiel 36:35; Zechariah 14:16).

The Eighth Day maps salvation for mankind

During the autumn festival season, yet one major event follows the Feast of Tabernacles.

This destination on the biblical map that Christ has revealed to His saints has astounding meaning. It figuratively shows the destination of all human beings who have ever lived from Adam's time to Christ's second coming.

It's called the Eighth Day or Last Great Day, following the seven days of Tabernacles. "On the eighth day you shall have a holy convocation . . . It is a sacred assembly, and you shall do no customary work on it" (Leviticus 23:36).

Keep in mind that as an ordinary road map has the appropriate symbols to depict the reality of destinations, so has God given symbols to show the reality of His major goals for humanity.

God's people are instructed to observe the Feast of Tabernacles for seven days, with the first day being a Holy Day (verses 34-35). Following, on the eighth day, is a final festival that represents the opportunity for salvation for all human beings who have ever lived without knowing nor really understanding God's truth. This involves a general resurrection to physical life, at which time Jesus Christ and His reigning saints will reveal the true path to salvation.

Let's notice two significant passages in Revelation 20 that help us understand this symbolic festival: "But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished" (verse 5). "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away . . . And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books" (verses 11-12).

True understanding will be given to the masses of past ages, who will then have their first opportunity to repent and change. It is a time of *judgment* because these human beings are then judged or evaluated by Jesus Christ in mercy and compassion over a period of time (1 Corinthians 11:31-32), not yet immediately sentenced.

Another notable passage is found in the oft-misunderstood prophecy of Ezekiel 37. The valley of dry bones represents the whole house of Israel, all 12 tribes (not just the Jewish people), who lived and died with no apparent hope. At this time, Christ will resurrect all human beings, Israelites and gentiles alike, all those who have ever lived and who never really knew God. They will be resurrected to physical life but offered His Spirit and the hope of salvation they never had (Ezekiel 37:11-14).

Though some will ultimately reject God and be lost—destroyed in a lake of fire (Revelation 21:8)—most will embrace Him and His ways, joining the saints in eternal salvation.

Jesus' return symbolized by the fall festivals

The four autumn festivals can rightly be compared to great milestones for all of mankind, mapped out in advance by God in His Holy Bible. Each one comes in its own order and proper sequence, just as following an ordinary road map from town to town leads to a physical destination. But with God's map, the end result is the salvation of humankind.

Most people today do not know or understand how to read and study the Bible. During this age of confusion, God's people are given the understanding to follow His map of the future leading to eternity with Him.

The grand ultimate destiny of humanity is to become immortal children of God the Father, younger brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, living and serving in the New Jerusalem on a new earth and throughout the universe forever and ever (Revelation 21–22; Hebrews 2:8; Deuteronomy 4:19).

Understanding God's plan and purpose revealed in the pages of the Bible constitutes the map that the people of God now follow in earnest. However, with the God-given ability to read His map of salvation comes responsibility. Those who have the knowledge of God, sprinkled throughout a darkened global society, should rejoice in these festivals and help show the world God's way and His path to salvation for mankind. BT

DIVE DEEPER



You likely have God's guidebook for your life and future—the Holy Bible. But do you have an understanding of His roadmap for your future and the future of all humanity? Request or download your free copy of *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.* This eye-opening study guide will take you through all the festivals of the Bible, showing their meaning for you and all mankind. **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so24 to find it.**

Images from left: kaisersosa67/E+ via Getty; World History Archive, Martin Sylvest via Getty, Matt Hernandez

Kingdom of Lies

The Demonic Assault on Reality

Efforts to destroy the family to remake society have sunk to now redefining sexuality on a fundamental level. These attempts arise from utopian dreams of reshaping the world into an imagined paradise free from biblical morality. Dark forces are driving the false hope and means of trying to realize it, posing an existential threat to humanity. But Truth will ultimately prevail.

by Tom Robinson

The 2024 Eurovision song contest this past spring was a disturbing spectacle, with a self-described non-binary "queer witch" representing Ireland in a song performance involving spells, hexes, voodoo dolls and Satanic symbols. An Israeli contestant, who was a more normal traditional singer and fan favorite, faced antisemitic vitriol. And the winner of the competition was a biological male from Switzerland in a feathered dress, who also claims to be non-binary—not male or female and rejecting this binary delineation of gender. Reacting to the win, the Irish witch declared exultantly, "The queers are coming!"

The Swiss winner's song, "The Code," is noted to be the singer's journey of discovery. The lyrics state: "I, I went to hell and back to find myself on track / I broke the code, whoa-oh-oh / Like ammonites [primeval mollusks], I just gave it some time [in evolving] / Now I found paradise / I broke the code, whoa-oh-oh . . ."

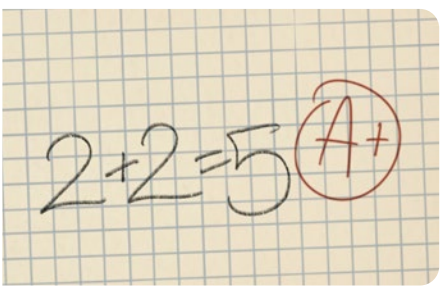
("I'm Done Playing the Game"—Nemo Shares Their Non-Binary Journey Through 'The Code' Lyrics," wiwibloggs, May 1, 2024, emphasis added).

There's a lot to unpack here. This idea of breaking the code to find paradise is a form of gnosticism—which includes the concept of attaining secret knowledge to reach the highest heaven and ultimate experience of spirituality. The code that's broken here is on one level that of biological reality set within one's DNA—broken in claiming a non-binary gender identity. More broadly, the code is the key to defining existence, with people seen as able to shift their own reality along with the reality of the universe.

This wishful, magical thinking is at the root of lawlessness, false religion and the godless utopianism sought through progressive or woke ideology and outright Marxism that ends up oppressing fellow man. For it's not enough for people to live in their own reality. They must have everyone







And then the heart of the matter is revealed: "Somewhere between the O's and 1's / That's where I found my kingdom come . . ."

The person is describing a personal struggle and then learning the secret to success through evolving into non-binary gender fluidity to discover paradise and one's personal realization of "kingdom come"—an allusion to the end-time Kingdom of God in the Bible, though that Kingdom will certainly not come in the terms laid out in "The Code."

The song is supposedly intended to be a call for everyone to "crack their own code and enter *the kingdom of authenticity*" else live in it—lest it be revealed as false.

There is no kingdom of authenticity in this. It's a kingdom of lies, being ruled by self-deception advanced through *demonic* deception! That won't stand in the end. For when it all comes down to it, there is no reward in denying what's real. It's the truth that sets us free.

Forcing make-believe

These days, we often hear of people supposedly speaking or finding their truth—as if they are the arbiters of truth. Yet we might ask, as Pontius Pilate famously responded to Jesus

Christ, "What is truth?" (John 18:38). In simplest terms, truth is reality—the way things actually are. And that's not up to individual determination. It's according to the determination of the Author of reality, the Creator God.

The idea that others can reshape the nature of reality into what they want it to be is false—an egregious, destructive lie. This lie was started by the very father of lies—Satan the devil (John 8:44). And he and his demonic minions have been using it to corrupt the world throughout man's existence—promising freedom and a happy world by means of reframing everything to make it so.

This twisted imagining leads to statist totalitarianism, thought policing and mind control for the supposed greater good. It leads to the insanity of trying the same failed practices again and again and expecting a different result. It leads to calling and believing evil good and good evil (Isaiah 5:20). And now we see it used to redefine human sexuality and cater to mental derangement as part of the overall agenda of destroying the family, collapsing civilization and remaking reality.

Marxism and other forms of utopianism are all about trying to bring about the wonderful brotherhood of man and world peace and a paradise (as in the Eurovision song). Following World War II, political philosopher Eric Voegelin labeled such efforts as attempts to "immanentize the eschaton"—to set up the Christian end-time vision of the Kingdom age in the world today. He explained this as a modern form of gnosticism, along with the idea that the disorder of the world can be transcended through special insight or knowledge (*The New Science of Politics*, 1952).

But such utopian movements proceed by upending any harmony that already exists, dividing society into an oppressor-oppressed dynamic in an attempt to stir conflict to collapse the system so as to bring the new reality into being out of the destruction of the old.

Moreover, we see in the history of these movements that the same governing, economic and moral principles are repeatedly forced through despite the evidence that they are unworkable. For instance, when socialism breaks down and doesn't work, progressives promoting it resort to excuses about implementation—never admitting the failure of its fundamentals. It *will* work, the thinking goes, we just have to *make* it work—the square peg into the round hole. The answer is to reshape reality to make it work—by sheer force of will and pretending until the desire is manifested, all the while lying that the espoused principles are succeeding. (For more on this, see "Utopian reasoning seeking to overturn reality" on page 19.)

On the gnostic side, there is in all this a sort of magical manipulation or practice of sympathetic magic. The concept is that certain symbolic actions will compel the natural world to behave as desired—for instance, a rain dance with certain shakings and sounds to invoke a rainstorm. It can even involve attempted conjuring—calling forth spirits or gods to do one's bidding. We see it today in what's called the "law of attraction"—to think the right thoughts to make things happen, to "speak it out into the universe" to have the universe act in kind. Yet no one has such power. It is in fact attempting to subdue God, which is the height of hubris and folly.



With communism, in terms of forcing through what is unworkable, the result has been catastrophic, with vastly more problems generated than solved, including the deaths of many millions of people. And many other millions have suffered in untold ways.

2 + 2 = 5?

For Marxist regimes, it's critical that all live within the authorized version of reality, not being allowed to resist it or call it into question. The same has become true in terms of leftist indoctrination throughout Western society today, with people blacklisted and "canceled" for not advocating the sociopolitical and ideological positions being broadly advanced—including the recent switch from transgenderism as a mental disorder to a sexual liberation to be celebrated.

But how do you get people to conform to what is patently false? It's accomplished through propaganda, reeducation, omission of facts, compulsion, gaslighting (feeding false information to get people to question their perceptions or sanity), brainwashing and silencing.

In George Orwell's famed dystopian novel *1984*, the protagonist Winston is faced with the ruling Party ordering him to reject the evidence of his eyes and ears. But he determines to hold on to truisms—the world exists, stones are hard, water is wet. And he writes in his diary: "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows."

Yet the totalitarian regime challenges that very point. Winston's inquisitor O'Brien tells him that reality is not external but in the human mind—yet not individually but only according to the collective and immortal mind of the Party, which Winston must relearn to become sane. O'Brien then tortures Winston, holding up four fingers and asking how many, to which Winston says four. But if the Party says five, O'Brien asks, then how many? Winston still says four. As the torture proceeds, Winston eventually says five, but O'Brien calls this a lie, since Winston does not believe it.

"'How can I help it?' he blubbered. 'How can I help seeing what is in front of my eyes? Two and two are four.'"

"Sometimes, Winston. Sometimes they are five. Sometimes they are three. Sometimes they are all of them at once. You must try harder. It is not easy to become sane."

Once a person's mind is broken down to question basic

Tristan B./Unsplash

> The idea that others can reshape the nature of reality into what they want it to be is false. This twisted imagining leads to calling and believing evil good and good evil.

reality, he's willing to just accept false reality. Our educational systems and media today are not yet to this extreme, but they have become bastions of gaslighting and brainwashing.

We now even see various professors rejecting the idea of math as neutral and objective, claiming that 2+2=4 "reeks of white supremacist patriarchy" and that the methods and results of this racist, sexist, gender-normative and thus oppressive discipline should not be accepted as reality (William Dembski, "The War on 2+2=4," Evolution News, April 8, 2024).

Yet mathematics is part of the logic of the universe invented by the Creator. Thus, casting off the reality of math is a rejection of God and His designs and rules. And it's the same with gender—of which there are two, male and female. Yet a liberal U.S. Supreme Court justice was not able in her recent confirmation hearings to define what a woman is! How far we have fallen!

Besides fundamental understanding, God's spiritual laws that regulate our behavior were given to bring blessings to our lives, keeping us and others from harm. It is in denying that reality and choosing alternate ways of living, thinking these will bring joy and fulfillment, that pain and heartache have been brought into the world.

The rise and fall of the father of lies

This has all been palmed off on the world by Satan the devil. As already mentioned, he is the very father of lies (John 8:44). And He has deceived the whole world (Revelation 12:9).

His deception of humanity began when he appeared to Eve as the serpent in the Garden of Eden and told her the big lie that she was immortal and could essentially be her own god (Genesis 3:3-6). But really this was about accepting his false reality along with him as her god, and Satan has continued to blind people to reality as the god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4). He and his demons operate as the real echelons of power in this world (see Ephesians 6:12).

Before Satan's deception of human beings, he spread his lies among the angels, those choosing to follow him becoming the demons. But his deception did not begin with them. It began with himself. We read in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 of his pride over his beauty and his decision to rebel against God. But what ultimately happened here was his own denial of reality—rejecting the positions of God and himself with respect to one another in imagining that he could form his own reality.

Moreover, it may be that Satan even saw himself as right and God as wrong, determining this for himself. We read in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 that Satan transforms himself into an angel of light, as his servants transform themselves into ministers of righteousness. We usually think of this as just a disguise. But in Satan's twisted reality, perhaps he has convinced himself that he is the good guy—that he is the hero of his story, leading the liberating rebellion against the evil Authority. Those who follow him often see themselves on the right side.

The world is caught up in Satan's denial of the reality God has established to create his own reality. But that is a lie. And believing we can run counter to the Author of reality with its immutable laws brings all manner of horrible consequences. Living contrary to the Creator cannot succeed, and it can destroy all of those who pursue this route—which has been all of us at times to varying degrees. Our need is for alignment with God's ultimate Truth, both in how we understand and how we live—submitting to God and resisting the devil (James 4:7; and read "Beware of Satan's 'D-Vices'" starting on page 16).

Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote a powerful essay in 1974 titled "Live Not by Lies" (a recommended read you can find online). Amid the crushing inundation of lies in society, he names "the simplest, the most accessible key to our liberation: *a personal nonparticipation in lies!* Even if all is covered by lies, even if all is under their rule, let us resist in the smallest way: Let their rule hold *not through me!* . . . Our way must be: *Never knowingly support lies!*" (emphasis in original). Instead, as he shows, we must stand for what we know is real and right—to "live by the truth."

The darkest days under the devil's rule are yet ahead. His lies will lead mankind not to paradise and a kingdom of authenticity bringing fulfillment, but to vast civilization-destroying war and the brink of extinction.

But then at last a new day will dawn with the return of Jesus Christ to rule the world. He will banish the devil, whose deceptions will then cease (Revelation 20:1-3). And under the reign of Christ and His followers from this age, the world will learn the truth of God and how to live by it (verses 4-6; Isaiah 11:9). (Be sure to read "Posting the Ten Commandments: A Law for the Future" beginning on page 6.)

As Jesus promised those who would accept and follow His teaching, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).

One day lies will be no more. But the Kingdom of the God of truth will flourish forever! BT

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To better understand the origin of Satan and his demons and their influence in the world, download or request our study guide *Is There Really a Devil?* And to learn how things will be when he's removed, also get *Christ's Reign on Earth: What It Will Be Like.* Both are offered free of charge.

Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so24 to find them.

Beware of Satan's "D-Vices"



It's vital to maintain vigilance in guarding against the enemy's attempts to corrupt and destroy us. We look here at some of the devil's tactics that share the same first letter in English.

by Larry Walker

The biblical Feast of Trumpets begins the fall Holy Day season (Leviticus 23:23-25), foreshadowing the return of Jesus Christ as King of Kings and Lord of Lords to wage the final stages of the war to replace Satan the devil as the ruler of this world. (To learn more, read "The Fall Festivals: Map to Our Ultimate Future" beginning on page 10, as well as our free study guide *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind.*)

The outcome of the war has already been determined—Jesus Christ's victory over Satan securing freedom and deliverance to all who serve God as His people: "Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death" (Hebrews 2:14, New Living Translation).

The Day of Atonement, following shortly after (Leviticus 23:26-32), reminds us of the removal of Satan and the reconciliation of ultimately the whole world. However, even though Christ's war against Satan has already been won, we must still fight our spiritual battles in this life.

And we must remember who our enemy is: "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits . . ." (Ephesians 6:12, NLT).

It's noted of Satan in 2 Corinthians 2:11 that "we are not ignorant of his *devices*"—the methods or means he devises to lead us astray and bring us harm (emphasis added throughout). Yet while not ignorant, we can be forgetful. We'll use some wordplay in English with the letter *d* to help us recall some of what we're facing when it comes to Satan's tactics.

Even Satan's title *devil* (from Greek *diabolos,* meaning slanderer or accuser) begins with the letter *d,* and he and his cohorts are called *demons.* Pairing with "vices" or immoral behavior patterns yields "d-vices."

Let's consider some of Satan's d-vices we need to look out for and the strategy we need to avoid them.

1. Deception

Satan is the very father of lies (John 8:44). Revelation 12:9 refers to him as "the great *dragon* . . . that serpent of old, called the *Devil* and Satan, who *deceives* the whole world." The New Living Translation more accurately translates the present participle as *"deceiving,"* showing an ongoing danger.

"Satan, who is the god of this world, has blinded the minds of those who don't believe. They are unable to see the glorious light of the Good News. They don't understand this message about the glory of Christ, who is the exact likeness of God" (2 Corinthians 4:4, NLT).

The devil is behind the "false christs and false prophets [who] will rise and show great signs and wonders to *deceive,* if possible, even the elect" (Matthew 24:24; compare 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

Some think the wording here means true Christians cannot be deceived by Satan. But that's not so, or what would be the point of verses warning believers against that? (See Matthew 24:4; 1 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 5:6; 2 Thessalonians 2:3; 1 John 3:7.)

Hebrews 3:13 admonishes us to "exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the *deceitfulness* of sin."

We are still susceptible to deception in many areas of life.

2. Division

The devil seeks to deploy the strategy of *"divide* and conquer" by trying to *drive* a wedge between God and His people, between church members, and especially between members and their pastor or other church leaders (see 1 Corinthians

3:3). Like those swayed by him, this evil being "*devises* wicked plans" and "sows *discord* among brethren" (Proverbs 6:18-19).

3. Distrust (especially of authority)

Satan seeks to *discredit* leaders by accusation (often false). This began in the Garden of Eden and is still rampant today—especially in politics.

The first generation of Israel out of Egypt constantly accused Moses and God of being against them (undoubtedly Satan-inspired). Many in the Corinthian congregation *distrusted* Paul (1 Corinthians 4:3-5).

4. Distraction

We must "serve the Lord without *distraction*" (1 Corinthians 7:35).

Satan wants us to be sidetracked, so he *diverts* our focus in two directions—*deceptively* attractive pleasures and *disorienting* problems. Satan uses problems to *distract* us from what God intends for us to focus on and grow in.

Jesus said: "But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed *down* with carousing, *drunkenness* [physical and spiritual stupor], and cares of this life, and that Day [of Christ's return] come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.

"Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34-36). The warning to "watch" means to be vigilant, to stay alert: "Be alert at all times" (New Revised Standard Version).

Observing God's Holy Days, as described in the introduction, helps us to remain focused on God's plan for us and all mankind.

5. Discouragement, despair, despondency, depression

Scripture warns against these negative feelings in the face of challenges and persecutions (Deuteronomy 1:21; Hebrews 12:3). They come from focusing on the problem instead of the solution—on the past rather than the present and future. The solution is to believe and claim God's promises and look forward in hope.

Learn from the past, live in the present and live *for* the future.

Damnation and death are Satan's weapons of mass destruction and his ultimate goal for his victims. He has "the power of death," but that power is broken by God through Christ, whose help we must seek.

6. Damnation and death

These are Satan's weapons of mass destruction and his ultimate goal for his victims. As we saw in Hebrews 2:14, he has "the power of *death*," but that power is broken by God through Christ, whose help we must seek.

"Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to *devour.* Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith" (1 Peter 5:8-9, NLT).

"'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:6-8).

Fasting is one of the best ways to resist the devil by humbling ourselves and staying close to God (read our free study guide *Tools for Spiritual Growth* to learn more). The Day of Atonement, picturing Satan's removal, is observed by fasting (Leviticus 23:27; compare Isaiah 58:3, 5).

"A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil . . . Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil" (Ephesians 6:10-11, 13, NLT).

7. Darts of destruction

A critical piece of that armor is this: "Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery *darts* of the wicked one" (verse 16)—all the temptations and troubles Satan throws at us to *destroy* us.

"The Greek word translated 'shield' . . . refers to the Roman soldier's large rectangular wooden shield . . . about 4 ft (1.2m) high, covered with leather on the outside. Before a battle in which flaming arrows might be shot at them, the soldiers wet the leather covering with water to extinguish the arrows. The Roman legionaries could close ranks with these shields, the first row holding theirs edge to edge in front, and the rows behind holding the shields above their heads. In this formation they were practically invulnerable to arrows, rocks, and even spears" (New English Translation footnote).

Satan is the *Destroyer* bent on our ruin (Revelation 9:11, NLT). But our faith will shield us from his fiery darts, and in standing together in faith as God's people the protective umbrella is extended.

It's vital to be wary of Satan's d-vices. And in case you're at the point of succumbing, I have another d-word for you—*don't!* Choose instead the d-word *God* offers to us—the *destiny* of eternal life in His Kingdom. BT

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Some people think the devil is a myth or just a metaphor for evil in people's hearts. But that plays right into his deception. For help to see the truth clearly, be sure to download or request our free study guide *Is There Really a Devil?*
Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so24 to find them.

Oscar Wong/Moment via Getty

Failed assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump



Many in America and around the world were in a state of shock over what happened on July 13, when an attempt was made to kill former U.S. President Donald Trump as he spoke at an election campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, in seeking to regain the presidency. A bullet grazed his ear, another rally attendee was killed, and two others were seriously wounded, while a Secret Service sniper killed the gunman positioned on a rooftop outside the rally.

It was remarkable to then see President Trump rise from amid his security detail, pump his fist and shout to rallygoers to keep fighting, hailed by many as an iconic moment in history. But the bullet had come very close to taking his life. A turn of his head to point out information on a screen at the critical moment kept the bullet from going through his head on live television. He acknowledged on his social media platform TruthSocial that it was "God alone who prevented the unthinkable from happening."

If Trump had been killed, it's possible civil unrest would have risen to a boiling point, with violent reprisals and uprisings. Thankfully that was averted, though we grieve for the victims and the conditions and confusion that drove this.

There are still many questions and grave concerns about what happened. How did the shooter know the roof would be unguarded so he could do this? Why was the roof unguarded then. There were so many security breakdowns. Many have worried about collusion and coverup. Congressional hearings revealed that the Secret Service, charged with protecting current and former presidents and presidential candidates, had not spoken to local law enforcement before the rally or even weeks after. This is very strange. As with some past assassination attempts, it's possible we may never get to the bottom of it in this life. No doubt dark spiritual forces were involved, as these influence various key events in the world.

As we contemplate what happened, all of us should be praying for our national leaders and interceding for our people (1 Timothy 2:1-4; see Daniel 9:3-19). Above all, we should be seeking the day when all such violence will be a thing of the past, praying to God, "Your kingdom come" (Matthew 6:10; see verse 33).

To understand the deep jeopardy America and other Western nations are in today, request or download our free study guide *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy.* And for more on the better world that lies ahead, be sure to read "Posting The Ten Commandments: A Law for the Future" beginning on page 6.

China's corrupt and deadly legacy

Communism is supposed to be about everyone sharing equality, but it never works that way. For instance, an article in India's *Sunday Guardian* by Paul Berkowitz and Bradley Thayer on April 21, 2024 noted:

"Global investigation into the wealth and corruption of the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] leadership will show that the CCP's leaders are billionaires with untold wealth in New York, Switzerland, Dubai, London, Paris, and countless other locations . . . No Communist should be wealthy; it is like being a married bachelor, and the CCP are expert at hiding their wealth."

In a televised interview on June 10, Thayer explained that China's communist leaders are the richest people on earth, having stolen the wealth of the Chinese people. That's the reality of communism—violating God's laws against lying, theft and coveting to the harm of many. And we see parallels with many of our progressive leaders in the West—some even touting their adoration for China's government.

It's worse when we realize that communism has been a system of murder. Communism and the wider umbrella of socialism have been the biggest murdering agents in world history—with the CCP the biggest of all. Besides the policies of Mao Zedong being responsible for an estimated 65 million people dying through starvation, persecution, prison labor and mass executions, the infamous one-child policy, lasting through 2016, brought about the forced abortions of half a billion unborn children. Yet again, as agents—for another who is not only, as Jesus Christ said, the father of lies, but also "a murderer from the beginning," Satan the devil (John 8:44).

Every year at this season, in the annual Day of Atonement, we are reminded of the day the devil's deceptions will end (read "The Fall Festivals: Map to Our Ultimate Future" beginning on page 10 to learn more). Pray fervently for that day, and for all who are suffering under the oppressions of this evil age.

War in Ukraine revives calls for a common European army

The war in Ukraine has stirred up the European debate about the need for a combined military. Poland's deputy prime minister and defense minister pointed out that Europe needs to form a rapid reaction force and appoint a defense commissioner ("The Ukraine War Revives Talk of a Common European Army," *Warsaw Business Journal,* May 18, 2024).

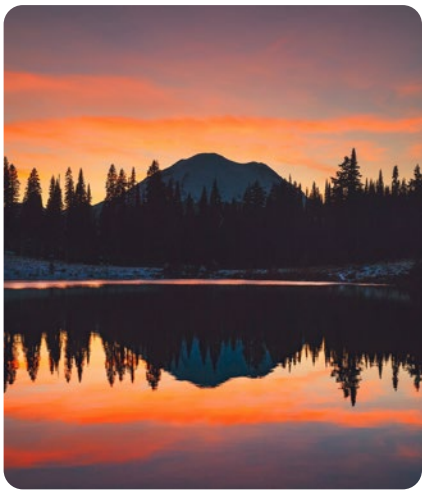
Further, "according to Eurobarometer research published in 2022, the vast majority of EU citizens (81 percent) support a common defense and security policy—in every EU country, this support is at least 2/3 of citizens. About 93 percent of EU residents agree that countries should work together to defend the territory of the Community, and 85 percent believe that defense cooperation should be strengthened at the EU level" (ibid.).

Bible prophecy informs us that at a certain point, European leaders will come together to empower a single leader, who will become a tyrannical ruler in a final revival of the Roman Empire. To learn more about what's coming, and the events that have led up to it, request or download our free study guide *The Final Superpower.*

Images, from left: Anna Moneymaker via Getty; Explore with Joshua/Unsplash

Volcano scientists worry over the threat of Mount Rainier

CNN reported earlier this year that Mount Rainier in Washington state in the U.S. Northwest has many scientists more concerned than the Yellowstone's supervolcano. One volcanologist explained: "Mount Rainier keeps me up at night because it poses such a great threat to the surrounding communities. Tacoma and South Seattle are built on 100-foot-thick (30.5-meter) ancient mudflows from eruptions of Mount Rainier" (Why Mount Rainier is the US Volcano That Troubles Scientists Most," June 26, 2024).



More than lava and ash, "many scientists fear the prospect of a lahar—a swiftly moving slurry of water and volcanic rock originating from ice or snow rapidly melted by an eruption that picks up debris as it flows through valleys and drainage channels . . . [One USGS research seismologist noted] 'And there are tens, if not hundreds of thousands of people who live in areas that potentially could be impacted by a large lahar, and it could happen quite quickly" (ibid.).

The Bible does tell us that there will be terrible natural catastrophes at the end of this age, and it's good to be mindful of such dangers. Yet there is no place in this world truly safe from calamity. All of us must seek God for protection and help to make it through. And we look forward to the time of Jesus Christ's reign on earth, when the world will no longer face such threats.

Utopian reasoning seeking to overturn reality

As explained in "Kingdom of Lies: The Demonic Assault on Reality" (beginning on page 13), socialists and other utopians who believe they can solve the world's problems effectively live in a fantasy world.

Communist founders Marx and Engels used a reasoning method laid out by German philosopher Hegel called dialectic—arriving at a resolution between two arguments—which they applied to overturning society. Their thinking is explained well by political scientist Victor Zitta in his 1964 book taking to task one of the main Marxist intellects of the Stalinist era (*George Lukacs' Marxism, Alienation, Dialectics, Revolution,* pp. 210-211).

Zitta gives three elements present in Marxist utopian dialectic reasoning (paraphrased, as the writing is academic):

1. *Alienation*—nurturing a sense of disconnect from the current state of things with a radically negative attitude toward it. Hating the way things are—rejecting reality as it exists. We can see this with Marxists, for sure. But it also fits every other kind of dissatisfaction and dissociation, as with sexual revolutionaries, especially those claiming to be trans or non-binary.

2. *Self-righteousness* in the certainty of one's own conclusions, refusing to question their own beliefs or ideas even despite evidence to the contrary.

3. *Idealization* of the imagined perfect future outcome to downplay or deny positives of the reality that exists and any problems in trying to overturn it. The utopians are committed to their course no matter the potential consequences to realize the idealized future.

And here we quote Zitta: "The self-righteous negation of the present for the sake of an equally self-righteously affirmed future, the basic matrix of the dialectic, is a consequence of the attempt to *immanentize the Christian eschaton* [to bring their own form of the future Kingdom today], a consequence of attempting to seek ultimate meaning in the temporal [the here and now]. But can ultimate meaning be found in the temporal?" (emphasis added). The answer is of course no. But the utopians persist.

Zitta also writes of using this reasoning as *mediation*—interacting with facts at hand through seemingly logical arguments to smooth out the contradictions and other problems in their so-called solutions. It's basically a lot of verbiage or deflection to make excuses for or just deny the fact that their way does not work. This isn't logic. It's sophistry—wise-sounding nonsense to win debates.

We see all this continuing in current progressive thinking and policies. But this thinking began with Satan the devil in his rebellion. It is God's purpose that we all learn the lessons of that errant course, and that we instead humbly and gratefully except the reality and future God has established for us.



Have You Made God Over in Your Image?



In the commandment against images, God was addressing more than physical idols. He was also telling us not to think of Him according to what we personally imagine, but to accept Him and our relationship with Him on His terms.

by Donald Ward

Have you made God over into your own image, coming to believe He thinks and is like you? The first two commandments state in summary that you shall have no other gods before the true God and shall not make and bow down to any graven image (Exodus 20:2-5). In the spiritual intent, that includes false images in the mind. Have you become your own God? Have you decided for yourself what is good and evil?

The words of an old Don Williams song illustrate how people have made God over into their own image: "I don't believe that heaven waits for only those who congregate . . . but I believe in love." It's often said, "I believe God just wants us to be good people and love everybody." Yet the Bible tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25).

The song lyrics conform to surveys of modern Christian believers. Even around 20 years ago, more than two thirds of American evangelicals surveyed doubted Scripture's words regarding salvation through Jesus alone. When asked if they believed "good" people of other faiths could also go to heaven at death, 68 percent of evangelicals said yes. Among American Catholics an astounding 91 percent answered yes, with 79 percent of American Christians altogether answering yes ("The Pearly Gates Are Wide Open," Beliefnet, August 2005).

Besides the great misunderstanding here about going to dwell in heaven at death as the reward of the saved—the Bible teaching instead that believers will be resurrected to reign with God and Christ *on the earth* (Revelation 5:10; 20:4-6)—the need for Christ is effectively dismissed.

The vast majority of those identifying as Christian apparently no longer believe Jesus' statement that He is the only way to God (John 14:6), echoed in the apostle Peter's testimony that there is only one name given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus died for the sins of the world. He is the Savior of the Jews *and* gentiles. So the *plan* of salvation is inclusive. It includes all races, nations and ethnic groups. But the *way* to salvation is exclusive. There is only one door and one way (John 10:7-9; Matthew 7:13-14).

So why would Christians come to a different conclusion? Scripture itself warned: "Because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12). We live in an age in which, as Isaiah prophesied, truth and justice have fallen in the street. Drive by a large box store on Sunday morning, when many think church services should be held (though

baronozdemir via Getty

mistakenly), and you'll find the parking lot full. Increasingly people see no need for church and seek only to discover the purpose God has for them and set out to accomplish their mission.

Rather than viewing God according to our thinking, we need to see what He reveals about Himself and us and look to His direction and help.

Rather than viewing God according to our thinking, we need to see what He reveals about Himself and us and look to His direction and help.

People attempting to know and define God on their own

Can a person forge a direct relationship with God apart from the Word of God? This is one of the great fundamental questions of the ages. That is, can you know God apart from divine revelation? People are born illiterate, and even after they learn to talk and read they are for the most part spiritually illiterate. They form their concepts about God based on the culture and spiritual environment in which they are nurtured. Generally, Buddhists beget Buddhists, Hindus beget Hindus, Muslims beget Muslims, Jews beget Jews, Christians beget Christians. There are exceptions, of course. Through proselytizing and immigration, the various religions of the world have made inroads into other cultures.

With mass transit and mass media, and especially now through the Internet, people are able to access the cultural concepts and mores of people around the world far more quickly than in the past—even with just the click of a mouse. All of these things have brought about a mixing and merging of various religious concepts. Forms of Christianity have spread around the world, but ironically the Christian religion has been influenced more by Eastern concepts the other way around.

In addition to these factors, we continue to witness a perpetual assault on the veracity of the Bible by the so-called scientific world and the broader culture. Evolution is taught as a fact, thus denying God as the Creator of humankind. Science in effect teaches that there is no spirit world and that all things in the universe are formed and governed by natural laws.

Yet the entertainment world is saturated with references to the supernatural. Almost every new television season abounds with programs that depict encounters with the paranormal. A large percentage of movies produced in recent years portray some kind of supernatural force. Cartoons and movies produced for our children are filled with evil supernatural characters such as ghosts, witches, fortune tellers, vampires, etc.

Sadly, mixed in with all this is the fact that many prominent church leaders have been exposed as hypocrites more concerned with fleecing the flock than feeding the flock. Furthermore, many of the men and women who teach theology in the universities and seminaries don't really believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God.

Yet there is something within the human psyche that yearns to transcend this mere mortal, physical existence—that causes him to reach for the stars, so to speak. In ancient times, people yearned to understand the how, what and why of their existence. So they turned to the heavens and formed themselves gods from what were not gods. In other words, they made God into their own image.

The prophet Jeremiah gives us an amazing description of the comparison between the gods made by man and the true God of the Bible: "Thus says the LORD: 'Do not learn the way of the Gentiles [the pagan nations]; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile; for one cuts a tree from the forest . . . They decorate it . . . they fasten it . . . so that it will not topple . . . They cannot speak; they must be carried, because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor can they do any good.'

"Inasmuch as there is none like You, O LORD . . . A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine . . . Thus you shall say to them: 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens' . . . Every metalsmith is put to shame by an image; for his molded image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are futile, a work of errors . . . The Portion of Jacob is not like them, for He is the Maker of all things, and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance; the LORD of hosts is His name" (Jeremiah 10:2-16).

People are left with two alternatives: 1) accept the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible through many infallible proofs; or 2) accept gods that are the product of human imagination. As previously noted, human beings are physical, finite, mortal and subject to sin and death. They are spiritually illiterate apart from revelation.

Ignoring the only real Source of spiritual power

Modern science denies revelation. So we cannot expect it to lead us to the true God. Even the major religions of the world are confused in looking for the advent of a great spiritual messiah to lead the world into a new age. The Buddhists are looking for the fifth Buddha, the Hindus are looking for Krishna, the Muslims are looking for a grand Mahdi, the Jews are looking for the Messiah but as a human leader. None of these religions is looking for the very Son of God as a spirit being filled with power to rule the earth as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And even most professing

Christians who believe in Christ's return don't understand His nature or what He's coming to do.

Sadly, people have long made God over into their own image. When it comes to the great social issues of the day, they employ human reasoning over what God would do. They argue: Would a loving God exclude anyone? So shouldn't we not exclude people practicing alternate sexual lifestyles? Yet these actually exclude themselves by embracing what's not in keeping with the Word of God.

God loves people and wants them to repent of sin. And we are to emulate Him, as in the expression "Love the sinner, hate the sin." Yet we are being conditioned to effectively love the sin as well. Thus, films that embrace today's corrupt culture are nominated for picture of the year. And very often such films are the big winners.

People go to church and listen to the minister, but they only perk up when he talks about current events or tells a gut-wrenching emotional story they can identify with. When he preaches the truth, their eyes roll back in their heads, and they begin to daydream and think about where they will eat lunch and what they will do with the rest of the day. In other words, they ignore the only real source of spiritual power.

In 2 Timothy 3:1-5, the apostle Paul graphically describes the corruptions of modern society that today's churchgoers have sadly followed in, the list ending with "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power." And in the next chapter he puts it on the line to the ministry: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

Truth comes only through divine revelation and relationship

Have you made God over into your own image? Have you denied the only source of true revelation—the Spirit of God and the Word of God? Note what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:9-12: "But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him. But God has revealed them to us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man, save [by] the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man, but [by] the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (verses 9-12, American King James Version).

> You cannot know the true God apart from revelation, and God reveals Himself through the pages of the Bible.

You cannot know the true God apart from revelation, and God reveals Himself through the pages of the Bible. This is the only way to know God and understand why you are on this earth. You were created for a great transcendental purpose. The god of this world is blinding the minds and hearts of the peoples of the world to the glorious truth of the gospel, but you don't have to remain blinded. You can come into the light. You can know the truth, and the truth can set you free from fear, ignorance, superstition and the dogmas of men who have made God over into their own image (John 8:32).

Jesus Christ said of Himself, "Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed" (verse 36). The only way that you will ever have the power to become a son of God is through Him. True Christianity is the only religion that teaches that you can become a son of God in the literal sense. Nominal Christian ministers talk about being the children of God, but they don't mean that as the Bible reveals (see Romans 8:14-17).

But most who profess Christianity don't really understand who God is, what God is and what His purpose is. Neither do they understand who man is, what man is and what is his purpose. God has made it possible through Jesus Christ for human beings to be reconciled to the Father so that we can receive the Holy Spirit, the very essence of God, and become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). Just as we are begotten by our physical fathers, God the Father begets us with His Spirit so that we can become the literal sons of God.

The Word of God means what it says when it says we are children of God. As sons and daughters of God, believers will not go to some kind of ill-defined concept of heaven or paradise. They are going to reign with God and Christ on the earth, following perfectly the will of God.

Making God over into our image is a denial of reality doomed to failure. Instead, we need to cooperate with God in His work to transform us into *His* image so that we will ultimately be like Him—the awesome purpose for which He made us! BT

DIVE DEEPER



There is nothing more vital than coming to know the true God as He has revealed Himself. To help you begin to comprehend His identity and His great reason for creating us, be sure to download or request a copy of our free study guide *Who Is God?*
Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so24 to find it.

How to Survive Uncertain Economic Times

Many today are finding it hard to get by. And amid elections and other consequential events, they fear things could worsen. The Bible gives important principles on managing our finances and making it through.

by Becky Sweat

These days, a lot people live in constant sticker shock. I personally can't get over how many of the grocery items I buy have doubled in price in just the last few years. Or the price has remained the same, but the packaging is smaller with less product. Housing, too, has gotten more expensive, now priced out of many first-time homebuyers' income levels. And renters bemoan rising rates while their wages remain stagnant.

A 2023 Forbes Advisor survey revealed that 78 percent of Americans live paycheck to paycheck (with no money left after basic living expenses). A 2023 Federal Reserve Economic Wellness Report found that one fourth of Americans routinely spend more than they earn. Many use credit cards to get by and are getting deeper into debt.

Looking to the years ahead, many economists warn of the potential for hyperinflation (inflation at a rate of at least 50 percent per month), stagflation (a combination of slow economic growth with high inflation) or a recession (a period of economic decline, marked by shrinking GDP and high unemployment). The impact of each of these is devastating for the average person.

We need to carefully manage our household finances so we can be ready for potential economic upheavals. And the premier place for guidance is the Bible. There are literally hundreds of Bible passages about managing money. Much of what Scripture says on the topic can be distilled to the following six principles. Living by them will help prevent financial problems, solve any current money challenges, and relieve financial stress.

1. Aim to be debt-free

Proverbs 22:7 cautions us to avoid debt, equating it with bondage: "The rich rules over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender." If you're burdened with heavy debt, in essence you've become a slave to your creditors. You no longer have the freedom to decide how to spend your paycheck because you're obligated to meet your debts.

In uncertain economic times, there's the added concern that if we owe a lot of money to creditors, we may not be able to pay down the loans or the principal at a later time, as we might not have an income source or the needed funds in our checking accounts.

A big concern with credit cards is the typically high interest rates. According to the May 2024 Forbes Advisor's credit



Sarah Noltner/Unsplash

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card rates report, the average credit card interest rate in the United States is 27.65 percent. That means for every $1,000 of debt, you will be paying $276.50 in interest annually. If you let the balance carry over month after month, you can easily end up paying far more than the original price of your purchases.

If you've built up a lot of outstanding revolving debt, paying off your credit cards should be your priority. "If you can, pay extra on the debts with the highest interest rates," advises Kerby Anderson in *Making the Most of Your Money in Tough Times:* "If all of them have comparable interest rates, you might instead pay extra on the one with the smallest balance. By paying that off first, you'll have a feeling of accomplishment and then free up some of your income to tackle your next debt" (2009, p. 61).

The goal, of course, should be to avoid getting into debt in the first place. Save up money before you buy nonessential, depreciating items like clothing, furniture, home décor, appliances, computers and new automobiles. Try to pay for these purchases with money on hand and not on credit. Only borrow for purchases that will likely increase or hold their value, such as a house or college tuition. Many financial advisors recommend only using credit cards if you're able to pay the full balance on the statement each month, so you don't have to pay any interest.

2. Look for ways to be more frugal

A key to staying out of debt is to economize. "Be willing to make sacrifices," urges Scott LaPierre in *Your Finances God's Way*. "Every cent counts. All the money we avoid spending puts us that much closer to being debt-free. This requires being frugal and intentional with purchases. We must often say no to things we want . . . If we expect to eliminate debt, we must live in a way that others might consider extreme. Our society is so indulgent that if we live 'normally,' we will never be debt-free" (2022, pp. 173-174).

Even with rising inflation and threats of recession, many people continue to buy what they don't really need and can't afford. We might deceive ourselves that our "wants" are really "needs," or reason that we must have certain nonessential items or live a certain lifestyle because our peers do. But that only gets us more in debt.

Writes Mahlon Hetrick in *Your Money in Tough Times:* "The world's way encourages us to be greedy, covetous and discontent, and to spend without discipline. The best way to prevent money problems is to adopt the following attitude: Use it up. Wear it out. Make it do. Or do without" (2012, pp. 14-15).

There are many ways to cut down on expenses. For starters, limit how often you go out to eat. Shop at rummage sales and thrift stores instead of department stores. Take steps to lower your utility usage. Check to see if you can find home and car insurance for less. Cancel streaming or subscription services you rarely use. Avoid hobbies and activities that cost a lot of money.

We can all learn to live with less. God tells us in 1 Timothy 6:8 and Hebrews 13:5 that we should be content with what we have. Jesus warned against coveting, saying that life is not about the abundance of one's possession (Luke 12:15). This is not to say we should never buy luxury items, but rather we shouldn't spend money we don't have or go in debt just so we can "keep up with the Joneses."

3. Establish a budget and stick to it

If you don't already follow a household budget, now is the time to create one. Simply put, a budget is a written plan to determine how your household income will be allocated. Budgeting is always important, but especially during uncertain economic times or when we're struggling financially.

While the term *budget* isn't in the Bible, having one certainly aligns with biblical teachings. Proverbs 27:23 says, "Be diligent to know the state of your flocks, and attend to your herds." Put in modern terms, this verse tells us we need to be aware of how we're using our money. Budgeting helps us avoid impulsive and unnecessary spending, live within our means and prepare for future needs. Not keeping track of where our money is going could cause us to get into debt or even lead to bankruptcy.

To develop a household budget, make a list of all your monthly expenses (mortgage or rent, utilities, groceries, car payments, credit card bills, and so on), and compare that to your monthly income. If your expenses are more than your income, you will need to cut out unnecessary purchases. If you have outstanding loans and credit card balances, you will need to decide if you can pay more than the minimum payment each month and how much you can pay.

Once you've established your budget, use a ledger, spreadsheet or a budgeting app to start tracking your monthly expenses. Review this periodically. If you're able to pay off credit cards or if other circumstances change, your budget can be adjusted. If you get to the point where there's no more money left for the month in a particular category, stop spending. Don't allow yourself to go over budget, and be determined to live within your means.

4. Build an emergency fund

Another way to prevent financial problems is to set aside money that can be used if you lose your job or your work hours are cut way back, you're injured in an accident and can't work for a period of time, or you have unforeseen expenses such as a major home or car repair.

The Bible encourages us to build up our reserves when times are good, so we can be ready for whatever the future might bring. In Proverbs 21:20, we're told, "Be sensible and store up precious treasures—don't waste them like a fool" (Contemporary English Version). And Proverbs 27:12: "A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions" (New Living Translation). Proverbs 6:6-8 describes the ant, which



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saves during times of plenty for possibly leaner times down the road. We, too, should save now for what might happen in the future.

A widely accepted rule of thumb is to keep enough money in your emergency fund to cover at least three to six months' worth of basic living expenses. That means enough to pay for housing costs, utilities, groceries, transportation costs, insurance premiums and other essentials for that time.

If you're strapped for cash, you might not be able to put much into savings all at once. In that case, you can build up your emergency fund gradually. Even just setting aside $100 a month will quickly add up to a useful nest egg.

Having cash reserves on hand reduces the need to rely on high-interest credit cards or costly personal loans should you have unplanned expenses or face lean financial periods—and it keeps you from falling into debt.

5. Tithe faithfully

You may be aware of the instruction in Malachi 3:10, which reads: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house." A tithe or tenth of earned income is supposed to go to God. (To learn more, read our free study guide *What Does the Bible Teach About Tithing?*).

However, when the bills start piling up and money is tight, tithing might get skipped. Some reason: "If we give 10 percent to the Church, we won't have any money for groceries. God understands, right?"

He certainly does. But God and His principles don't follow human "logic." God tells us to tithe, and we are to obey that command, in good times and bad, and even if it doesn't make sense from our limited human perspectives.

God knows that tithing benefits us, which is part of why He tells us to do it. He also knows our needs, and He promises to take care of us. The last part of Malachi 3:10 says that when we faithfully tithe, God will "open . . . the windows of heaven, and pour out . . . such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it." The blessings can be spiritual or physical.

Spiritually, when we tithe, we start depending more on God and draw nearer to Him, and in turn He draws nearer to us (James 4:8). This leads to a closer relationship with God. Moreover, when we step out on faith and obey God by tithing, even when it's hard for us, we grow in godly character.

In terms of physical blessings, I've known people who were struggling financially but still tithed, and then out of the blue they were offered very lucrative side jobs, their property taxes were significantly lowered, they were given much-needed household items, or someone did a typically costly home repair for them at a greatly reduced rate.

If we stop tithing, we might miss out on the blessings God wants to give us. Of course, we shouldn't tithe just because we hope to get something in return. But we can rest assured, knowing we will be far better off tithing than if we don't.

6. Put your confidence in God, not in your finances

We must always remember that God, not our bank accounts, is our true security. We're commanded in 1 Timothy 6:17 not to "trust in uncertain riches but in the living God." Proverbs 11:28 warns that "he who trusts in his riches will fall."

Our financial assets have only limited usefulness and could easily be wiped out in an instant, perhaps through theft or an economic downturn (compare Proverbs 23:5). Think about all the people during the Covid lockdowns who lost jobs, their businesses or company pensions failed, or their stock portfolios shrank. It could happen again.

In 2023, we saw numerous bank failures. Financial observers warn there could be more in the next year or two. Experts have also predicted a stock market crash within the next few years, bankruptcy of the U.S. Social Security system, more bankrupt corporate pensions, a real estate crash, or even a total collapse of the U.S. economy due to the massive federal debt, the diminishing role of the U.S. dollar in international trade and other factors. The world's financial systems are on very shaky ground.

Ezekiel 7:19 says economic times will become so severe right before Christ's return that people will be throwing away their gold and silver as worthless. That verse alone underscores how unreliable our financial assets ultimately are. Whatever does happen, only God can be counted on to be there for us.

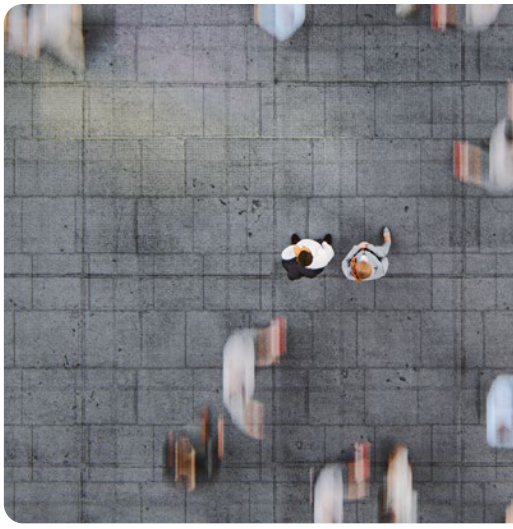
Now, we must still do our part to wisely manage our household finances, as we've seen. That's a matter of practicing personal responsibility. But once we've done what's in our control, the rest is in God's hands. And Matthew 6:25-34 assures us that if we are truly seeking God and His righteousness, He will take care of us. Remembering this will provide us with the right focus and peace of mind as we face troubling economic times. BT

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Alone With Christ in a Crowd



Amid life's turmoil, the remarkable story of the woman who sought healing in touching Jesus' robe encourages us to reach for our Savior today.

by Robin Webber

On the eve of the 20th century, American essayist and poet Walt Whitman wrote about an ever-expanding urban life swallowing up humanity, its delicate framework already crowded with everyday personal challenges. He contemplated whether he and others should allow life to melt away and settle into despair. What was a person to do?

His poem "O Me! O Life!" begins: "Oh me! Oh life! of the questions of these recurring, of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities filled with the foolish . . ." And it concludes: ". . . What good amid these, O me, O life? *Answer.* That you are here—that life exists and identity, that the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse" (*Leaves of Grass,* 1892).

With these words of wisdom in mind, let's focus on a person who elected to leave her life of despair and *contribute a verse*—one who moved through a crowd and came forward to share a solitary moment in time with Jesus Christ. Though we don't know her name, she reaches down to our day and with her "contributing verse" touches those who have heeded Christ's invitation of *"Follow Me"* (Matthew 4:19, emphasis added throughout).

Her story begins as news quickly spreads around Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, that the miracle worker from Nazareth has just come ashore (Mark. 5:21; Luke 8:40). His previous visits are fresh in their minds. A large crowd gathers. What might He do now? Jairus, one of the leaders of the synagogue, scurries towards Jesus and *falls at His feet,* imploring Him: "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and *lay Your hands on her,* that she may be healed, and she will live" (Mark 5:22-23). A procession forms, with the two of them boxed in by the moving throng.

A woman on a mission

Jairus' urgent plea creates the condition for the unnamed woman to enter the gospel stage and contribute a verse. While everyone is moving forward to Jairus' home, she is steadily moving step-by-step from the rear towards the One from Nazareth. Scripture introduces her as suffering from ongoing bleeding, beyond the regular menstrual cycle, for 12 years (verse 25). She had endured a great deal under the care of many doctors, and had spent all she had. Yet instead of getting better, she "grew worse" (verse 26).

What's the story behind the story? As explained in William Barclay's *The New Daily Study Bible* commentaries (2017): "The shame of the woman was that ceremonially she was unclean (Leviticus 15:19-33). Her issue of blood had cut her off from life" (*The Gospel of Luke,* p. 134). It "shut her off from the worship of God and the fellowship of her friends" (*The Gospel of Mark,* p. 149). Whatever she touched or touched her was considered polluted and unclean. So she was treated as an "untouchable."

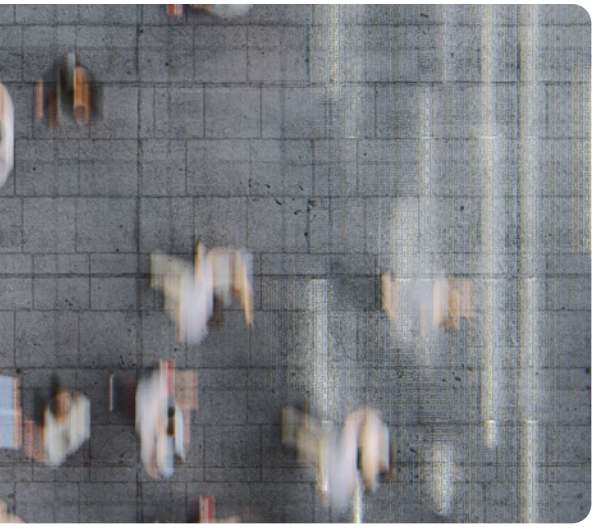
Is it any wonder, then, that she was not as open as Jairus? "Here I am!"—*no!* Scripture describes how she steadily maneuvered through the crowd to be *behind* Jesus (Matthew 9:20; Mark 5:27; Luke 8:44). Due to her untouchable status, she sought to obtain divine intervention discreetly. Moving forward, "she thought to herself, 'If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed'" (Mark 5:28, New Living Translation).

Her focus was to touch the "fringe of his robe" (Matthew 9:20; Luke 8:44, NLT). The fringe refers to tassels worn by the Jews on the corners of their outer garment to remind them they were chosen of God and belonged to Him (Numbers 15:38; Deuteronomy 22:12). How much more this man sent by God, perhaps the Messiah Himself?

Amazingly, when she touched Him the bleeding immediately stopped. However, there is another twist and turn on this stage in Capernaum.

Jesus touched twice

The woman is not only healed through the touch, but Jesus is immediately impacted by it as well. He knows at once that power has gone out from Him. He turns around in the crowd, asking: "'Who touched my clothes?' His



gremlin via Getty

disciples said to him, 'You see the crowd pressing against you and you say, 'Who touched me?'

"But he looked around to see who had done it. Then the woman, with fear and trembling, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell down before him and told him the whole truth" (Mark 5:30-33, New English Translation). Luke 8:47 adds, "In the presence of all of the people, she explained why she had touched him and how she had been immediately healed" (NET).

At this moment, it's as if Christ pulls down the curtain on the surrounding crowd, and He and the unnamed woman are alone. His undivided attention is on her. It's a God moment—a sweet moment of companionship. Jesus was not only touched from behind, but His heart is touched by her gift to Him of something so rare in the human condition—faith! He responds: "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed of your disease" (Mark 5:34, NET).

Just then a message comes from Jairus' household informing the anxious father that his daughter is dead and that Jesus no longer needs to come (verse 35). Little did they know or realize—*but they soon would*—that it was time for Jesus to anoint (to touch) a dead body to bring life. Man's endings are but where God begins!

> Don't let the crowd or your crowded emotions get between you and the Source of all good things. Take a breath and move forward with the knowing pace of what is shared in the next element to focus on.

Following in faith

Allow me to share three elements of this story of faith to incorporate in our lives, that we too may "contribute a verse" as we heed Jesus' invitation of *"Follow Me."*

1. We are never truly lost from God in a crowd. Psalm 139:1-4 enlightens us: "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, You know it altogether."

Jesus expands upon this psalm's encouragement by reminding us: "Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will" (Matthew 10:29). Our Heavenly Father knows our rises and falls and is resolute about what He has in store for us—yet in His timing and ways towards His perfect will, beyond our human moments.

2. When in doubt, be like the woman on a mission in moving towards Christ in faith. Don't let the crowd or your crowded emotions get between you and the Source of all good things. Take a breath and move forward with the knowing pace of what is shared in the next element to focus on.

3. We worship a God who touches us and is touched by us. Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man, came to earth so that our Heavenly Father through Him might touch humanity and in turn might be touched by us.

Remember how the ailing woman came from *behind* to touch Jesus? Keep that thought in mind as we are invited to appear *before the risen Christ* in Hebrew 4:14-15: "Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize [*be touched*—King James Version] with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin."

Please note: There is a point of contact and impression created as we humbly but confidently press upon Him in prayer. The invitation is for us to come before or in front of Him as He continues to reach out and touch us with His love for us. Even in our spiritual imperfection in moments of our humanity, He nonetheless says, *"Follow Me."*

Remember also until next time: We exist and have identity in Christ! (Galatians 2:20). And be prepared to contribute a verse! BT

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MAN?



by Dan Preston

We've all probably seen movies where a drill sergeant is trying to whip some new recruits into shape. They run for miles, do push-ups and other seemingly impossible tasks, which they inevitably fail at. The tough old sergeant then screams at them, "You all are some of the most weak-sauced excuses for the male species I've ever seen! Are you a man or not?!"

Is that what being a man is about? Being stronger, faster and tougher than others? Or maybe it's more about being the funniest, smartest or wealthiest. Maybe you're so handsome and dress so well, you could be a model for the cover of a fashion magazine—someone the world envies. While there's nothing wrong with being wealthy, handsome, strong or funny, is that what it means to be a man?

PETER PAN SYNDROME

"I don't wanna grow up!" That in essence is what's known as "Peter Pan Syndrome." Boys refusing to accept the responsibilities of adulthood and clinging to the things of youth. You know the clichés: not wanting to take out the garbage because of being afraid of the dark; making crude, off-color bathroom jokes; doing poorly on a test from playing video games too much instead of studying. In some cases, young men find themselves unable to live on their own because they don't have a decent source of income.

The Bible paints a picture of manhood that's at once masculine and tenderhearted, courageous and wise, bold and courteous, self-assured and teachable, independent and responsible for others, strong and gentle. If every man strove for a biblical idea of masculinity, we'd see stronger families, secure children and more productive companies.

Here are some ways to strive for biblical manhood in your own life.

RESPONSIBILITY

The apostle Paul wrote, "And whatever you do, *do it heartily,* as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ" (Colossians 3:23-24, emphasis added). In general terms, this points to taking pride in your work. Whether you sweep floors or are the CEO of a multibillion-dollar corporation, work like Jesus Christ is your boss.

Paul continues, "But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality" (verse 25). In other words, don't make excuses for things not going well or a job not being completed; rather, take responsibility to get it done. If the garbage didn't get taken out to the curb because no one reminded you until it was dark, it's not the fault of others because they didn't remind you sooner. It's part of your weekly chores. Don't make excuses. Just find a way to do what you're supposed to do.

As a younger teen, you can show responsibility in various ways: following through on your responsibilities at home, taking your schoolwork seriously and doing the best job



"AND WHATEVER YOU DO, DO IT HEARTILY, AS TO THE LORD AND NOT TO MEN . . ." WHETHER YOU SWEEP FLOORS OR ARE THE CEO OF A MULTIBILLION-DOLLAR CORPORATION, WORK LIKE JESUS CHRIST WAS YOUR BOSS.

you can do, helping out your parents however you can, taking an interest in the older people at church to learn their history, volunteering to serve at church in ways you know you're able.

Older teen years are a time when there are more growth opportunities: working hard in school to help you get admission to college, being a safe driver, working to save money for school or a car. Whatever it is, do it as if to the Lord, and take responsibility for your future!

MAINTAIN BALANCE

While being a man requires taking on the responsibilities of manhood, there is a caveat to consider. Some begin to develop a mindset of "succeed at all costs." While this might help you earn "fat stacks," it doesn't necessarily result in being a very good person.

Being a man doesn't mean asserting yourself over others in a controlling way to get the best job or gain popularity. It requires humility, tenderness and having compassion for others as well.

Consider the way Jesus Christ lived His life. Among human beings, He is the most dominant figure of all time! Yet He didn't act in a domineering way, promoting Himself over others. In fact, it was quite the opposite: "Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd" (Matthew 9:35-36).

Jesus Christ could have demanded that others bow before Him. Yet we don't see this. In fact, rarely do we read that He allowed others to worship Him. While some may view compassion as a form of weakness, especially in men, the life Jesus lived shows otherwise.

CHANGES WITH TIME

What it means to be a man changes a bit through life, especially if you get married and have children. The Bible states that a husband is to be the leader of his family (Ephesians 5:23). However, there are right and wrong ways to be a leader. Remember the drill sergeant at the beginning of the article? While that might be appropriate in preparing for war, is that the type of demeanor a husband should have toward his wife? Of course not!

Colossians 3:19 (New Living Translation) says this: "Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly." It's a simple but profound reminder: Always show love and respect for your wife! Or, as the case might be for you, for a young woman who could someday be your wife.

Once children come along, there is a new responsibility that comes with it. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 reminds us: "And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." It's a simple reminder that, once again, being the head of the household comes with responsibilities. Not only should we treat others with love and respect, but we have a responsibility to teach the children we bring into this world about God's love, laws and way of life.

A HELPER ON THE JOURNEY

The responsibilities of Christian manhood can sound daunting. Thankfully, you don't need to do this on your own. Help is available to you besides parents and friends. That help is from God and is available through the Holy Spirit. For more on that, check out the article "What's It Like to Get Baptized?" from the Fall 2021 issue of *Compass Check* (you can find it at ucg.org/so24).

BE A MAN!

The next time you're presented with a commercial or discussion about how to be a man, consider it carefully. Is what's being promoted in line with what God promotes for manhood? Or is it just a way to sell you something or trying to teach you to dominate others? If so, those pushing their message probably don't know as much about being a man as they claim.

God created people—men and women—for a purpose. He is building a family in His image. As young men, you play a key part in God's plan. By taking on the responsibilities of adulthood and tempering your drive with compassion, you will be the kind of man God wants in His family! BT

Compass Check highlights articles from our youth-oriented brand by this same name.

All images via Unsplash

Q: You speak of the commandments as the way to life and blessing. But isn't Jesus the way? Aren't we saved by grace through faith in Him and not through law?

A: This matter has confused a lot of people over the centuries. The biblical answer is that there is no either-or here. In fact, it's not exactly a matter of both either, as if these are two different courses. Rather, they are together one course, one way, the *only* way.



In laying out His laws, God explained to Israel: "What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the LORD and His statutes which I command you today for your good?" (Deuteronomy 10:12-13; compare Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Jesus did not do away with this instruction, as many assume (see Matthew 5:17-19). When a young man asked Him how to have eternal life (Matthew 19:16), Jesus responded, "If you want to enter into life, *keep the commandments"* (verse 17, emphasis added throughout). The young man asked which ones, and Jesus proceeded to list a number of the Ten Commandments, along with the summary command to love one's neighbor as oneself (verses 18-19).

Jesus rebuked the notion that obedience is not necessary, asking, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord [meaning *Master* or *Ruler*],' and not do the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). And He further stated, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who *does the will* of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Again, obedience is a requirement.

Jesus taught His disciples to keep His commandments as He kept His Father's commandments (John 15:10). And He had already commanded that people obey God's commandments. Some assume Jesus merely gave a new commandment to love, but what was new was that they now had Him for a model to emulate, to know how to love (John 13:34). But as we just saw, that included His obedience to His Father's commandments.

In fact, the apostle John would later write: "For this is the love of God, *that we keep His commandments"* (1 John 5:3). He even said: "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:3-4).

Where, then, is the need for faith in Christ? Apart from Him, no one can be saved. He stated directly: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Salvation is only through Him (Acts 4:12).

Apart from Him, people face a dire predicament: "All have sinned" (Romans 3:23)—that is, transgressed God's law (1 John 3:4, King James Version)—and "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). So all have been condemned for that. But we can receive forgiveness from God through Christ's sacrifice: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

Yet this is not permission to go on sinning. Jesus' command is to "go and sin no more" (John 8:11). But that's a tall order. For as the apostle Paul explains: "The mindset of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so" (Romans 8:7, Christian Standard Bible). So how do we obey?

We are not capable of sustained obedience without divine help. We must receive a new nature from God through receiving His Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38; 2 Peter 1:4). Jesus then lives in us to help us obey, with God's laws written on our hearts and minds (Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 8:10). For our part, we must cooperate, continuing to repent where we fall short, and never turn away.

Salvation is indeed a free gift upon repentance and faith (Ephesians 2:8-9). But it is conditioned on our continuing in repentance, which entails regret over our disobedience and commitment to obey going forward—and we must follow through.

Some claim that meeting conditions would be earning salvation. But our obedience does not obligate God to save us. Salvation remains a gift. And we could not meet the conditions on our own in any case. Yet we could *refuse* to meet them, which would be disqualifying, a path we must resist (see 1 Corinthians 9:27; Hebrews 12:4). Yet again, the needed strength comes through Christ's help.

It should further be noted that while Jesus is indeed, as He said, the way, the truth and the life, these descriptions also fit the law of God. "Blessed are the undefiled in *the way,* who walk in *the law* of the LORD!" (Psalm 119:1). "All Your *commandments are truth"* (verse 151). "Set your hearts on . . . all the words of *this law.* For it is not a futile thing for you, because *it is your life,* and by this word you shall prolong your days" (Deuteronomy 32:46-47).

It makes sense when we recognize that Jesus is the Word of God (John 1:1-3, 14)—the One who spoke these laws to Israel on behalf of the Father. He exemplified these laws perfectly. And they describe His nature. He died to forgive us of walking contrary to these laws so that we could, through His help and power, live in obedience to them. We will still fall down at times, but must continue repenting and growing through Christ (1 John 1:8–2:2; 2 Peter 3:18).

What this all means is that it's not a matter of law *or* grace—of the commandments *or* salvation through faith in Christ. Rather, it is by grace that God grants forgiveness of sins through Christ's sacrifice, and His grace empowers obedience through the Holy Spirit, with Christ living in us to help us grow and overcome, leading us to salvation. All of this is the one and only way to eternal life and blessing. BT

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To understand much more, request or download our helpful study guide *What Does the Bible Teach About Grace?* and our comprehensive book *The New Covenant: Does It Abolish God's Law?* Both are available free of charge. **Scan the code or visit ucg.org/so24 to find them.**

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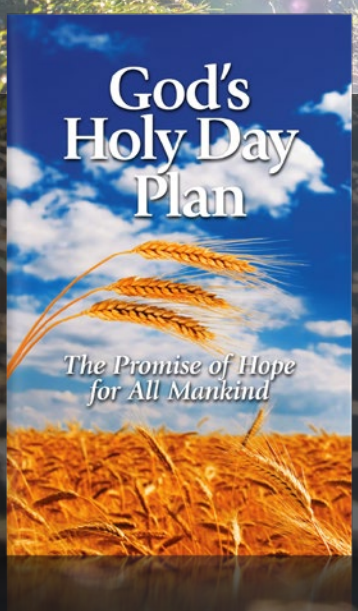
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