

Winter 2023

ENGAGE

A Journal for Church of God Ministries

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Harvest '24
- Don't Underestimate the Power of the Seeds You Sow
- New Study Projects Increased Charitable Giving From Evangelicals
- Most Evangelicals Say Worshiping Alone Is a 'Valid Replacement' for Church Attendance





Engage Journal is published in the interest
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From the Editor | Cameron Fisher

Significant Shifts Spawned From a Shutdown

We all realize the extended period of shutdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic changed the dynamics of many aspects of life; including ministry. While the mass closures of churches and temporary elimination of gatherings was worrisome, most will agree it was necessary at the time to combat the deadly surge. No one knew what the long-term effects would be. As the weeks turned into months, ministries, including the Church of God headquarters, were challenged into thinking of new ways to keep in touch with their constituencies.

Zoom conferences became the norm during this period. As they pondered whether or not to postpone the 2020 General Assembly, the Church of God Executive Council had to meet virtually to make that historic and heart-wrenching decision. During the next year, the Church of God conducted many more Zoom conferences, virtual meetings, and online events.

Difficult as this period has been, at least two positive changes have arisen for Church of God headquarters: (1) leaders are more accepting and comfortable with virtual meetings and events; and (2) it has mandated long-overdue technology upgrades.



Prior to 2020, conducting committee and board meetings in person was the norm. While they took place, virtual meetings were a second choice . . . and second class. Today, Zoom gatherings have become more accepted. In fact, for the first time in a “non-pandemic” era, the Executive Council will conduct their January 2023 meeting via Zoom. That meeting will be streamed through the latest equipment installed over the last two years and the Executive Committee will join the Council from a newly updated Conference Center at headquarters. Any time meetings are conducted online, expenses for travel and accommodations are realized.

In-person gatherings are not going away, and nothing can replace the face-to-face interaction of being together. But we can be thankful that when virtuality is necessary, God has provided the technology and technicians to bring it to the masses. ■



Harvest '24: Laborers Together for Great Commission Completion

By Tim Hill



(EDITOR'S NOTE: To reach as many of our constituents as possible, a similar version of this article will appear in the January-February 2023 issue of the *Church of God Evangel*)

Last September I shared with a gathering of state overseers, youth directors, and leaders of the International Offices what I feel God has placed upon my heart for the 2022–2024 Assembly period for the Church of God. It's called *Harvest '24*. The time is critical for our movement to be a leading participant in finishing the Great Commission. It started with the *FINISH Challenge* in 2012, which led to the *FINISH Commitment* that has been our spiritual compass for the last six years. Time is of the essence for us to FINISH and fully carry out the Commission given to this church.

Now, as the church focuses on this next 18-month period, we must actively engage *Harvest Commission 2024*—reaping the Harvest!

FINISH has been the acronym preceding *Challenge*, *Commitment*, and now, *Commission*. The six-word mandate has been revised to incorporate the word “commission” within each task and sets the framework for this latest initiative:

Find – commission the seven million Church of God constituents to find the lost;

Intercede – commission the body of Christ to engage in a global prayer movement;



Network – commission the networking of leaders, pastors, ministers, laity, and local churches;

Invest – commission the resources to fulfill the task;

Send – commission and send God-called disciples sharing the gospel in the Spirit and Power of Pentecost; and

Harvest – commission a global missional force to maximize the Harvest.

Everyone has witnessed the unprecedented shift in culture of this last decade since the launch of FINISH Challenge. Up and down the spectrum there has been unrest and radical change. We have seen mainstream acceptance of the redefinition of marriage and a societal permeation of LGBTQ+ that has attempted to “normalize” alternative lifestyles, threatening the traditional family. Across the political landscape the left and right have each become more rigid in their respective agendas, alienating those seeking compromise and cooperation. High profile events have sparked racial division, shifting the narrative back to center stage, deepening a divide that has threatened the very fabric of this nation. Worldwide dissemination of these agendas through a vast social media network continues to spread hate and dissension. Throw in a global pandemic and we have a recipe for the turbulent age in which we live today.

Despite a gloomy social forecast, I am encouraged by the promise of the future of this great movement—the Church of God. Who could have imagined that in the midst of a worldwide

shutdown of services that our churches would find new ways to deliver and advance the Gospel, realizing growth in both numbers and finances? We have witnessed this upcoming generation of young ministers already taking their places on the front lines of spiritual warfare ready to reap the global harvest as they prepare themselves for ministry through credentialing. And we, as the body of Christ, have grasped the mandate to plant life-giving churches, providing a safe haven of instruction and discipleship for the nurturing of the saints around the globe.

There are three primary objectives of *Harvest '24*. We have already realized partial fulfillment of many, including a significant infusion of new church plants in South American countries. These objectives will be the focus of a special task force of church leaders who will be meeting on a regular basis to implement the emphases outlined below:

ADVANCE the Coverage of the Gospel

- Renew the focus of the Church of God on being “A Spirit-Empowered Church fulfilling the Great Commission” while releasing every leadership dimension “to go” and actively engage the Harvest with the prayer and goal of **“Covering the Earth with the Gospel” by 2030**—a Bible, a believer, and a local church body in every nation.
- Enlarge the national and global



Harvest footprint of the Church of God in cities, counties, and countries with **1,000 new churches throughout the world**. We will embrace a renewed call to the priority of evangelism through intentional and organic church planting by initiating state/regional and district church-planting initiatives.

ACTIVATE the Calling of a Generation

- **Engage, prepare, and credential another generation of 5,000 ministers ages 17-25** throughout the world with a goal of 1,000 in North America.
- Invest in leadership development at all levels of the church through more accessible paths of **learning opportunity** and ministry preparation.
- Encourage Church of God laity and ministers to prepare and actively participate in every level of church functions, including **participation in the 79th General Assembly** in Indianapolis, Indiana.

ACHIEVE the Continuity of Significant Growth

- Mobilize the fiduciary responsibilities of the International Offices by **retiring debt on existing facilities** that has been a twenty-year process; and further accelerate the fulfillment of other obligations, thereby releasing resources to help

fund the Harvest perpetually.

- Launch regional renewal through the attained and combined objectives of community evangelism and benevolence, personal discipleship, World Missions participation, student engagement, and spiritual renewal birthed by a **return to daily Bible reading, consistent prayer, and a lifestyle of Christian witness**.

Here's the bottom line: If we accept the charge, we must commission the missional force to go—it's that simple. Commissioning is the act of granting authority to someone. As we set our focus on the Great Commission finish, we must commission global leaders, pastors, ministers, laity, local churches, states, regions, and nations to implement the dedication and act of commissioning as we engage in finishing the mission of the Great Commission.

I have never been prouder than now of the Church of God for its embrace of the FINISH Commitment, and now the FINISH Commission. With God's anointing, we will arrive at the 79th General Assembly in July 2024 with a victorious report of hundreds of newly credentialed, young ministers, testimonies of thousands of new church plants, and the full retirement of burdensome debt. Accomplishment of these objectives will boldly propel us toward the goal of a "finished" commission! ■



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Dixon Pentecostal Research Center 2022 Spirit of Azusa Award

The Dixon Pentecostal Research Center recently honored Dr. Peter A. Thomas with the Spirit of Azusa Award. The award presentation and a reception in Thomas's honor was part of the Seventeenth Annual Azusa Lecture held in the Lee University Chapel on November 10. Both the award presentation and the lecture highlighted the intercultural nature of the Church of God's global ministry.

The Dixon Pentecostal Research Center launched the annual Azusa Lecture and Spirit of Azusa Award in 2006 on the centennial of the renowned Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles. The award honors those who represent the ongoing work that God did at Azusa Street. Characteristics of that revival include an emphasis on Pentecost, a sense of global mission and evangelism, and a commitment to raising up gospel ministers.



David Roebuck presents the Spirit of Azusa Award to Peter Thomas alongside wife Debbie.

Previous Recipients

2021—Estrelida Y. Alexander
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2018—R. Lamar Vest
2017—Paul L. Walker
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2011—Margaret Gaines
2010—Lovell R. Cary
2009—Vinson Synan & Bill F. Sheeks
2008—T. L. Lowery
2007—Ray H. Hughes Sr.
2006—Robert E. Fisher (posthumous)

Peter A. Thomas, D.Min., is field director for Church of God World Missions in Africa and director of World Wide Help Africa. A German missionary, he has served in Africa since 1979 as pastor, teacher, national overseer, regional and field education coordinator, regional superintendent, and now field director. He earned his Bachelor of Arts (equivalent) from European Bible Seminary in Rudersberg, Germany, and his Master of Arts, Master of Divinity, and Doctor of Ministry from Pentecostal Theological Seminary. Having taught in Ghana and served as Christian Education coordinator at the regional and field levels in Africa, the Church of God Division of Education presented him with their Distinguished Educators Award in 2004.

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Don't Underestimate the Power of the Seeds You Sow

By J. Lee Grady

When I was seven years old, my father took me to a Billy Graham crusade held in Montgomery, Alabama, at the Cramton Bowl—site of the prestigious Blue-Gray football classic. It was 1965. I don't remember much of what Billy Graham said, but what I do remember vividly is that my grandfather, who was visiting us at the time, got up and went to the stage when Graham invited people to make a decision to follow Jesus.

My grandfather died two years later. But the decision he made in that stadium changed his eternal destiny—all because Billy Graham came to Alabama and planted a powerful seed.

Graham died in 2018, but it is estimated that he preached to 215 million people in live events. At least 2.2 million made decisions to follow Christ as a result of Graham's meetings. It is fascinating to look at history and discover how this powerful evangelist made his own decision to follow Jesus. The short synopsis of the story goes like this:

- In 1858, a humble Sunday school teacher in Boston named Edward Kimball shared the gospel with a young shoe store clerk. That young man's name was Dwight L. Moody, and he became one of the greatest evangelists of all time.
- Moody then inspired a preacher in England to become an evangelist. His name was F.B. Meyer. He then went to Massachusetts, where a young minister named J. Wilbur Chapman heard Moody speak and responded to the call of God on his life.
- Chapman then mentored a young man named Billy Sunday, who became one of the most prominent evangelists of the 1920s after a successful baseball career. Some people in Charlotte, North Carolina, were so inspired by Billy Sunday's evangelistic meetings that they organized a campaign in their city and invited a Kentucky-born revivalist named Mordecai Ham to preach.
- A young teenager named Billy Graham listened to Mordecai Ham from the back of a pickup truck during that weeklong series of meetings in





Charlotte in 1932. Graham decided to follow Christ.

The chain reaction from Edward Kimball to Dwight L. Moody to F.B. Meyer to J. Wilbur Chapman to Billy Sunday to Mordecai Ham to Billy Graham is just one example of the way the message of salvation spreads. I hope you understand that you are part of this story. Who sowed the seed in your heart? But what is more important is who is being affected now by the seeds you sow?

Jesus constantly talked about seeds. He compared preaching the gospel to seed-sowing, and He warned us that the precious seed must be planted in “good soil” (Mark 4:20).^{*} He also said the kingdom of God “is like a man who casts seed upon the soil” (4:26), and He compared the gospel to a mustard seed because it seems insignificant at first but “grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants” (4:32).

We often think of evangelism when we think of sowing seed, but everything we do for the Lord is sowing. Whether I teach a class, preach a sermon, witness to an unbeliever, mentor a disciple, minister to kids, write a book, compose a song, or send an encouraging text to someone who is sad, I’m sowing a seed. When we do this through the power of the Holy Spirit, that seed has power.

You are full of seeds! And God designed you to not only sow those seeds and water them, but also to bear much fruit. Whether you just started planting seeds in others, or you have been sowing

for years, God’s promise stands: “. . . in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary” (Galatians 6:9).

Many Christians today are weary of sowing. They look at negative trends in our culture, or at the disappointments of their own lives, and they throw up their hands. Even a large number of pastors and ministry leaders are giving up because of financial, cultural, and spiritual pressures. The devil rejoices when he convinces Christians to stop sowing the eternal seed.

Please keep investing. Never quit sowing. Your feeble efforts today may produce a Dwight L. Moody, a Billy Sunday, or a Billy Graham in years to come.

Harvests don’t appear overnight. Farmers must patiently endure the rigor of plowing; they experience painful setbacks and dry seasons. We sow in tears, but joyful shouts come when we reap! Don’t be discouraged by the barren fields. In due time, you will be amazed by the size of the fruit that comes from the seeds you sowed. ■

^{*}All scripture references are taken from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB) 1995 edition.

J. Lee Grady was editor of *Charisma* for 11 years and now serves as contributing editor. He directs the *Mordecai Project* (themordecaiproject.org), an international ministry that protects women and girls from gender-based violence. His latest book is *Set My Heart on Fire* (Charisma House).



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Poll: Most Evangelicals Say Worshiping Alone Is a 'Valid Replacement' for Church Attendance



For the first time, a biennial survey has found that most Evangelical Christians in the United States believe that worshiping alone or only with one's family can be a valid substitute for going to church, a possible effect of widespread closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to a report released by the Southern Baptist Convention—affiliated Lifeway Research, titled the “State of Theology”—66% of Americans agreed that “Worshiping alone or with one’s family is

a valid replacement for regularly attending church.”

This represents an increase compared to past years, with 58% of respondents agreeing with the statement in both 2020 and in 2018, while 59% agreed when polled in 2016. Just over 52 percent agreed in 2014.

When broken down by religious demographics, Americans with Evangelical beliefs are most likely to disagree with that statement than respondents without



Evangelical beliefs (41% to 20%). Yet, 54% of Americans with Evangelical beliefs agreed with the statement. In 2020, just 39% of Americans with Evangelical beliefs agreed with that statement.

Sponsored by Ligonier Ministries, the 2022 study drew data from a survey of more than 3,000 Americans conducted January 5-23, with a sampling error estimated to be plus or minus 1.9%. Similar studies of its kind were released for the years 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020.

Scott McConnell, the executive director of Lifeway Research, said in a statement released Monday that he believed the COVID-19 pandemic played a factor in the findings.

"Religious identity, beliefs, and behavior are interrelated," said McConnell. "When in-person church attendance behaviors were interrupted and habits were broken, it affected some Americans' beliefs about the need to gather with other believers to worship."

The new study also found that 60% of United States adults believe that religious beliefs are "a matter of personal opinion" and "not about objective truth."

"Many Americans think about God as if He had only revealed Himself in a vague, nondescript way. They seem to fill in the gaps with whatever they want to believe," McConnell stated.

The study revealed that a little more than half of United States adults (53%) say sex outside of traditional marriage is a sin, in contrast to 42% who disagree.

This marks an increase in Americans who see nonmarital sex as sinful compared to 2016, when 49% said it was sinful.

The study reported that 46% of Americans believe that the Bible's condemnation of homosexual behavior is not relevant to today, while 42% believe that it is still relevant.

"Discussions of sin are inherently theological, because they explore whether God set standards and what behaviors miss this mark," McConnell noted.

"So, those who acknowledge certain behaviors as sin are acknowledging a deity's standards. This is a different discussion than whether society agrees on an ethical standard of conduct that we determine."

In October of last year, Pew Research Center released a report finding that Evangelical Protestants were more likely than other religious groups to report having churches that had fully reopened and to oppose COVID-19-related worship restrictions.

According to Pew's report from 2021, 49% of Evangelicals said their churches were open without any coronavirus-related restrictions, compared to 20% of mainline Protestants, 19% of Catholics, and 14% of historically black Protestant churches. ■

(Source: This article was originally published online at christianpost.com on September 22, 2022. By Nicole Alcindor, *Christian Post*)



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Acts 20:35



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New Study Projects Increased Charitable Giving From Evangelicals



A new study from Grey Matter Research and Infinity Concepts explores monthly partner giving among Evangelical Protestants, and projects nearly \$2.4 billion annually in dependable income could come from prospective monthly partners.

The findings are detailed in *The Sustainers: Exploring Monthly Donor Partnerships*, a study of over 1,000 American Evangelical Protestants released today.

The research found that 58 percent of Evangelicals gave to at least one charity or ministry outside of a local church in the last 12 months. Among these donors, 34 percent have signed up to give monthly to at least one organization. In the charitable world, these people are generally referred to as either sustainers or monthly partners.

Another 22 percent have previously been sustainers with a charitable organization, meaning 56 percent of all Evangelical donors have experience as sustainers.

Evangelical donors are 27 percent more likely to be current sustainers than American donors in general.

Evangelicals with higher incomes, along with those who give more overall, are considerably more likely than other Evangelicals to be sustainers. Those who are more spiritually engaged—read the Bible regularly, attend church regularly, etc.—are also substantially more likely than others to be sustainers with at least one charity or ministry. Pentecostal and Charismatic Evangelicals are also much more likely than other Evangelicals to be sustainers. The study explored reasons for being a sustainer and for not being a sustainer.



"The main reasons for being a sustainer come down to three things: convenience, connection, and certainty," explains Mark Dreistadt, founder and president of Infinity Concepts. "Convenience simply means, it's easier for the donor or ensures they don't neglect to give. Connection means that a monthly partnership demonstrates their commitment to the organization or helps them feel more connected to it. And, certainty means that it is not just for the donor, but that the organization has a dependable monthly income stream to fund its work," Dreistadt continued.

Ron Sellers, president of Grey Matter Research, notes the reason Evangelical donors most commonly cite for not being sustainers is that the amount they can give varies from month to month. "Over half the non-sustainers say inconsistent finances cause them to avoid monthly partnerships," Sellers notes. "The other major reason is that a third of them prefer to vary whom they support, rather than have an ongoing commitment with the same organization."

Sellers noted some good news for charities and ministries in the findings. "Only 28 percent of Evangelical donors cite trust issues as a reason they avoid being sustainers. This might be a reluctance to provide bank or credit card information to any organization, worries that they will not be able to get out of the program, or just not trusting any organization enough to make a monthly commitment."

The report notes there are about 6.7 million Evangelical Protestants who are

ready prospects for sustainer relationships: they already give \$200 or more annually to organizations outside their church, and they do not cite inconsistent finances as an obstacle. If each of those donors signed up to give \$30 a month (\$1 per day) to just one organization, that would represent a dependable monthly income for charities and ministries of more than \$2.4 billion annually.

As Dreistadt stated, "Just thinking about what could be accomplished with over \$2.4 billion each year should make ministries and charities take a hard look at whether they are forming the kinds of connections with donors that lead to monthly partnerships." ■

Definition of "Evangelical Protestant"

This study uses the definition of "Evangelical" favored by the National Association of Evangelicals, based on four key spiritual beliefs.

The Authors:

Grey Matter Research is a marketing research and consumer insights company with extensive experience serving the charitable and faith-based sectors.

Infinity Concepts has served clients worldwide for 20 years as America's premier Christian brand communications agency and fundraising consultancy.

(SOURCE: Infinity Concepts)



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LEGAL NOTES

DENNIS WATKINS

Insurance Issues for Churches: Fire Loss



Introduction

In previous articles, I have discussed the issue of insurance for churches generally, and director's and officer's liability insurance particularly. I would like to expand the topic of insurance for churches by discussing the issue of fire loss.

Fire Loss

Fire loss for churches is one of the saddest and most difficult issues for churches to deal with, because these losses are usually catastrophic. Nothing is as difficult as seeing a church congregation witnessing the destruction of its property by fire. It is a very emotional and traumatic event for a church.

Many people may not know this, but fire loss claims represent an extremely large percentage of dollar amounts for

church insurance claims. This is because any fire can almost immediately engender hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages.

What to do in the event of a fire.

The event of a fire at church property can become very hectic and emotional right off the bat. If this event occurs, you should **preserve the scene** and save as much evidence as you can. This includes having a very thorough photographic investigation for others coming behind. The site should be secured, and you should immediately contact your church insurer and all the necessary church officials. I have seen more than one instance in which a burned church building was dismantled too early and there was not enough evidence to substantiate the claim.



Enforcing your church insurance policy

As in the unfortunate instance of a fire in a personal residence, the biggest concern is to be able to adequately replace the building and property that has been damaged. Keep in mind that the cost of labor, materials, and other items necessary to replace your building increases annually. The most important thing for you to remember is to make sure you increase your insurance coverage accordingly. You should evaluate the replacement cost of your building and property annually.

In the fire loss provision of your church insurance policy—"insured to value" or "full replacement cost"—in the policy is what you need to have. Your goal should be to have enough insurance money to fully replace your building.

"Co-Insurance Penalty"

As if having a major fire and damage is not enough, many church insurance policies include a penalty if you have not properly increased the insurance coverage value of your property over time. In these policies, if your coverage has not kept up with inflation, you will be assessed a "co-insurance penalty" which will decrease your recovery based on various complex calculations. Sometimes this penalty can be significant. Just be mindful to keep your coverage for fire loss current and adjusted for inflation.

Sometimes you can ask your carrier for "functional replacement cost" for older and historical buildings.

Loss Recovery Assistance

Sometimes the issue of fire loss and proper recovery of churches can become very complex, even to the extent of needing additional assistance outside the church in order to properly negotiate such a large claim. Rest assured that your church insurance company will have its own experts and technical advisors who sometimes can evaluate a claim on the "low-ball" side. In such cases, I have found that there are experts available who can come to the aid of churches and assist them in adjusting these complex claims. One such company that I have used is known as "Loss Recovery Group (LRG)." This company has assisted numerous Church of God churches with these claims. By way of disclosure, these types of companies usually work for a percentage fee of the amount recovered but, in most cases, this is well worth the engagement of these firms.

Conclusion

I sincerely hope you never have to deal with the issues of a fire loss claim in your church, but if so, I hope you can revisit this article and properly approach these salient issues. ■

Dennis Watkins is legal counsel for the Church of God. The writer is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional services herein. If legal advice or expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. Special thanks to Grace Tinsley and Kayla Foley for their assistance in writing this article.

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MONEY MATTERS

ART RHODES



Surviving an Economic Downturn

When we talk about the financial markets, and the economy as a whole, most investors are using words like terrible, horrible, awful, and similar terms. Those words bring to remembrance a little book that is often read to children. In the book, *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, Alexander goes through several scenarios of his terri-

ble, horrible, no good, very bad days. On one of his bad days, Alexander talks about going to bed with gum in his mouth and waking up with gum in his hair!! After all these bad days, Alexander finally concludes that he will just go to Australia. Regrettably, due to the global nature of the current economic downturn, not even going to Australia will make investors feel good.



While we have seen sporadic “green shoots” over the last few weeks, there is little doubt that the U.S. economy, and most likely all developed economies of the world, are either in, or are headed toward, recession. While many are predicting that we will see a moderate to heavy recession by mid-2023, several brave forecasters are suggesting that when we look back, it will be evident that we entered a recession during the first quarter of 2022.

A recession has historically been defined as two negative quarters of GDP growth. While the third quarter of 2022 showed a slightly positive GDP number (+2.6%), the first two quarters of 2022 were negative, theoretically signaling that we were already in a recession. However, those that peg the start and the end of a recession have been reluctant to call the current environment a recession because of one factor—job growth. During the 17 recorded recessions that our country has experienced, never has there been job growth in a recession. It is unheard of to have job growth and negative GDP growth in the economy at the same time—but it occurred throughout the first six months of 2022; in fact, the worst first six months to start a year for the stock market in more than 52 years.

Regardless of whether the experts say we are already in a recession or not, most people believe that recessionary times are upon us. With inflation hov-

ering near 8%, fuel prices soaring, and home sales coming to a halt because of rising interest rates, it may not technically be defined as a recession, but everyone feels as though it is a recession.

The financial data seen in the newspaper daily is alarming. Existing homes sales have declined each month this year, while the median price of existing homes is up 8% compared to last year, at more than \$384,000. However, demand for apartments fell to the lowest level in 13 years following continuous increases in rental prices of over 25% just in the last two years. Some renters are taking on roommates while others are opting to live with parents or relatives. Living with parents in your childhood bedroom has become normal behavior for many 20 (and 30) year olds. The ability to purchase a home has been totally taken off the table for most young families as mortgage rates have more than doubled in 2022. A fully mortgaged \$350,000 home in December 2021 would have cost the homebuyer approximately \$1,475. That same home in December 2022 would cost the homeowner \$2,385 . . . or \$910 more per month.

The shift in these financial variables over the past 12 months has been nothing but unrealistic. To go from a year of record growth in 2021 to the chaos and declines we saw in 2022 is basically unheard of in financial markets history. The most surprising factor



was how unrelated and uncorrelated assets moved in tandem. When we took basic economics in high school or college, we were taught that stocks and bonds are uncorrelated, and therefore, when one goes up, the other will go down, and vice versa. Historically, that has been the case until 2022 when stocks and bonds both plummeted, with blue chip stocks down 25% or so, and with longer duration bonds down 14-15% as well.

We have come to expect stocks to have bad years where they lose double digits. However, we have never expected or even considered that bonds could be off double digits also. Since the creation of the U.S. Aggregate Bond Index in 1976, the worst that bonds have ever performed was -2.9% in 1994. However, through the third quarter of 2022, the Aggregate Bond Index was off -14.6%. That is basically five times worse than the previous worst year's performance.

So, as Alexander suggested in the children's book, should we just pack up and move to Australia? Not yet. There is no question that the U.S. economy is still the strongest and most durable economy in the world. When other nations fold, we will still be left standing. However, going forward, lawmakers are going to have to exercise care in how they spend taxpayer dollars. We are approaching a point in the federal budget where entitlement payments and debt service costs, now with rates

up substantially, are going to consume some 80% of the dollars available. In that scenario, either tax revenue has to be raised, spending has to be cut, or the government just deficit-spends to keep providing the same level of services. Hard choices will be required.

If you are only a few years from retirement, exposure to the financial markets can be difficult in recessionary times. However, if you are five or more years from retirement, the coming months could be a great buying opportunity for you as an investor. Just remember that advice for your friend may not be the best advice for you. We are all on different paths and have to make different decisions. Most importantly, remember my advice to everyone—just breathe!!! ■

Art Rhodes
President and CEO
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DOCTRINE AND POLITY

DAVID HAN

Perils of the “Hyper-Grace” Movement

In giving a stern warning to watch out for false prophets, Jesus spoke plainly to His disciples: “Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. . . . Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:17-20 NIV). What distinguishes a “good” tree from a “bad” one is the kind of fruit it bears; further, the eventual fate of a tree that does not bear good fruit is to be thrown into the fire. Jesus’ admonition underscores the truth that our identification with God is essentially intertwined with practicing righteous and holy living. The Lukan parallel passage finds Jesus rebuking: “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” (6:46). Coming to Jesus would have no value unless one’s actions bear witness to a transformed life. “Fruit-bearing” is not an option, but an essential part of what it means to be identified with Christ.

In recent years, however, the so-called “Hyper-Grace” Movement has propagated a message that diminishes the necessity of righteous and holy living in the life of a believer. Grounded in a revisionist understanding of the Protestant principle on grace, i.e. *sola gratia* (i.e. grace alone), the proponents of this movement claim that the redemptive work of Jesus Christ has

addressed all sins both preemptively and irrevocably—whether they are of the past, the present, or the future. They also argue that law in all forms or shape is “antithetical” to grace and is therefore inconsequential to Christians. Their dismissal of the law intends to reject any value or acknowledgment given to human agency, including the promotion of righteous and holy living in the way of salvation. They erroneously conclude that any talk of human agency runs the risk of espousing a “mixed-grace” gospel that ultimately dilutes the “unmerited” favor of God’s grace and advocates “work-righteousness.”

Is it then scripturally correct to say that God’s grace renders obsolete any and all expressions of human agency in the life of salvation? Is repentance superfluous in the life of a believer since God has already forgiven us of all sins—past, present, and future—in Jesus Christ? Has the redemptive work of Jesus Christ nullified the law of God entirely and altogether? That is, is there no place for the law of God in the life of a believer? In the next few pages, we will address these questions and, in the process, help unearth perilousness of the hyper-grace message.

1. Law and Grace

Let us first examine how the Scriptures speak of the nature of law and grace, as well



as the nature of relationship between them. In Romans 5:20, Paul admonishes us that “the law entered that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more” (NKJV). The word, “hyper-grace,” is traced to the Greek word, *hyper-perisseuo*, used in this verse. The term, *perisseuo*, already carries with it the meaning of “exceeding far more” than what is normally expected. The prefix, *hyper*, then underscores even more profoundly the characteristic of the abundance of God’s grace in “covering” our sins. It is true that law unveils our sinfulness while grace covers our sins with “much more” abundance and, as a result, restores the pathway to salvation. Paul’s emphasis on the abundant character of God’s grace is not, however, intended to rule out the significance of our corresponding response in gratitude. As a matter of fact, inasmuch as one realizes the abundance of God’s grace, it is natural to expect this would trigger a fitting response attested in the transformation of the heart’s dispositions and life’s behaviors. In short, the provision of grace anticipates one’s devotion to a life of righteous and holy living; after all, it is God’s grace that empowers us to respond in this way.

Speaking further on the law and grace, Paul reminds us that the reconciling work of Jesus Christ effects freedom to those who believe. Since Jesus Christ “has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us” (Galatians 3:13), believers are no longer bound by the works of the law but called to the life in freedom (5:13). Our salvation is no longer founded upon doing the works of the law but believing in the redeeming work of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Paul writes:

Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore, the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (3:23-27 NRSV).

The freedom from the enslaving power of sin originates neither in our inherent abilities nor in the actions we take to satisfy the demands of the law. Such life in freedom flows from believing in the work of another—Jesus Christ. “The one who is righteous will live by faith,” says Paul (3:11, see also Romans 5:1; Habakkuk 2:4).

Does the fact that the infrastructure of our salvation is rooted in the redemptive work of God’s grace in Jesus Christ then warrant a dismissal of the law entirely and altogether in the life of a believer? Should the law be categorically declared as obsolete once you believed on Christ? In answering these questions, we should note the difference between being legalistic about the law and abiding in/by the law. We should note that, in both contextual and theological terms, Paul’s admonitions about the law were particularly leveled against those who were being legalistic in their pursuit of, and reliance on, the works of the law. His warning was against those who were still thinking that they could be justified as righteous by keeping up with the demands of the law. Insisting to follow the law in this



way, they glossed over the fact that we were rooted in sin without inherent power or capacity to do anything good and righteous on our own. Consequently, they had unduly elevated the element of human agency that undermined the redemptive work of God's grace in Jesus Christ. In short, Paul was reminding his audience the absolute necessity of God's prevenient act of grace in Jesus Christ in providing the infrastructure for the life in salvation.

Abiding in/by the law is not, however, the same as being legalistic in keeping up with the demands of the law. It is likened to a home wherein parents lay down the rules of behavior for their children at an early age and lovingly correct and guide them by those rules with a view toward maturing them into responsible adults. Children do not earn or lose parents' love by keeping up with the rules since parents' love is presupposed. As a matter of fact, the love that the parents have for their children is the very foundation upon which those rules are established in the first place. Adherence to the rules provides opportunities to learn how to behave rightly and be responsible. In going through this process, they might also learn the love of their parents that was foundational and intricately woven into those rules. Similarly, the law of God may expose us of our sins, correct our ways, and even rebuke us at times; but, they ultimately unveil God's loving heart toward us. So, as the psalmist David declares, those who seek Him with a pure heart and hunger for righteousness delight in the law:

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;

they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb (Psalm

19:7-10 NIV).

That the law functions differently than grace should not result in its dismissal or making it obsolete. It is certainly true that we are saved by believing in the redemptive work of grace in Jesus Christ, not by following the law. However, once initiated in the way of salvation, should we not pursue it with an ongoing cultivation on the dispositions of heart and behaviors in life? The Scriptures do not teach us simply to revel in the fact that we are saved by grace; instead, it calls us to respond in kind to the grace given. Paul address this when he admonishes the Galatians about how to use the freedom afforded to them through Jesus Christ. By nature, Paul says, such freedom is not meant to be used as "an opportunity for self-indulgence" but rather as the vehicle for doing the works of love (Galatians 5:13 NRSV). Paul then declares that, "The whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (5:14). This is certainly reminiscent of what Jesus told His disciples: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you,



you also should love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). If the whole law is ultimately purposed to lead us in loving one another, and loving one another marks us as the disciples of Christ, the law is certainly not antithetical to grace; it is rather complementary and responsive to the ultimate purpose for which grace is given. Instead of having to choose *either* law *or* grace, the Scriptures encourage us to affirm both the law *and* grace, acknowledging the functional difference of each in the life of a believer.

Another particular peril with the Hyper-Grace Movement has to do with its limited understanding of the nature and the function of grace. For the most part, they believe the important function of grace is remedying sin at the initial moment of believing on Christ. The Scripture, however, reminds us that grace is not only given *initially* at the moment of conversion, but it also works *throughout* the life of a believer so that the believer may know the love of Christ and "be filled up with all the fullness of God" (Ephesians 3:19). Grace is the power of God that enables us to do good works (see Ephesians 2:10) and helps us grow as a mature believer in Christ "to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ" (4:13 NASB). In all instances of its provision, grace then testifies truths about *who God is* and *how God relates with us*. Whether initially or thereafter, grace unveils the loving heart of God toward humanity that was constant and consistent since the foundation of the world. God did not begin to love Adam and Eve at the moment

of their failure. Grace extended to them at the Fall was not *an afterthought* with God. Instead, it is *an eternal quality* in Him. So, grace was not extended accidentally to remedy the situation, but it was rather a natural manifestation of *who God is* and *how God relates with us*. In other words, grace as an eternal quality in God has been consistently made evident in both the creation and the redemption narratives. Creation was an act of God's grace. Without any coercion or necessity, God creates the universe and allows creatures to exist alongside Him. Moreover, God willed to have relationship with them. In particular, when God created human beings, He created them in His own image and established the covenant of life with them (see Genesis 1:26-27). So, the psalmist David marvels at God's mindfulness, particularly with humanity:

When I consider Your heavens, the
work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You
have ordained;
What is man that You are mindful
of him,
And the son of man that You visit
him? (Psalm 8:3-4 NKJV).

Grace did not *initially* appear as a remedy to the fractured relationship at the first moment of human failure; rather, it would be more accurate to say that the grace of God *continued* regardless of the fracture caused by human disobedience. To illustrate the continual nature of the unfolding of God's grace, we should note that, even as He justifiably punished Adam and Eve (see Genesis 3:17-19) and banished them from the Garden of Eden (see 3:23-24), God continued to be gracious toward them and



made a provision for them. He took a life of another to provide “garments of skin” to cover them (3:21 NIV). This was the foreshadowing of God’s final redemption in Jesus Christ wherein the shedding of innocent blood covered the sins of many (see Hebrews 9:28). The redemptive narrative of Jesus Christ was then not an isolated or separate event from all other gracious actions of God; it was, rather, their ultimate fulfillment. It testified decisively and finally of God’s loving heart toward humanity which He had consistently demonstrated since the beginning of time.

2. Repentance in the Life of a Believer

The proponents of the Hyper-Grace Movement also reject both the necessity and the importance of repentance in the life of a believer. They argue that repentance (i.e. confessing of sins) should take place only at the initial moment of conversion. Since the conversion, being now placed under the new covenant, a believer has no more need to repent of her or his sins. They argue that the blood of Jesus Christ has not only cleansed sins of our past, but also keeps on cleansing our sins at the very moment we commit them. Following this line of thinking, they even argue that our future sins are already dealt with and preemptively forgiven by God’s grace. Hence, for believers, there is no need to confess our sins or ask for forgiveness in repentance. To believe anything otherwise, they say, is to pursue the path of “works-righteousness.” For the proponents of the Hyper-Grace Movement, believers need not repent, but only believe that God’s grace has already forgiven them

of all sins, including the sins they may commit in the future.

First, Scripture teaches us that repentance is a work of God’s grace, affecting the *whole person*. It represents a complete reversal, involving the person’s mind, heart, and will. The penitent person becomes conscious of the offense caused by sin, experiences a profound sense of remorse and even the hatred over sins (see 2 Corinthians 7:10-11), and wills to change life’s behaviors. The person’s life should no longer be enslaved to sin which leads to death; instead, he ought to pursue the life of obedience unto righteousness (see Romans 6:16). However, insofar as repentance represents a directional change involving all dimensions of what constitutes the person, it is not just an event or experience that is complete in and of itself. It serves as the vehicle through which a new way of living is opened up. Repentance places the individual on a completely different and new path in life with the anticipation that the individual will follow through with the process of being acclimated to the new way of living. So, Paul urges:

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2 NRSV).

Second, repentance is more than what happens to the individual. It prompts a *change in relationship* with God. Having made a radical turnaround at the initial repentance, the individual enters into a restored relationship with God. As is the case with any relationship, the change becomes



effectual only if the individual involved will actually live up to it. For the believer, this has to do with living in accordance with the Spirit who indwells him. So, Paul warns: “We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Romans 8:12-13). Intending to live in accordance with the Spirit, the believer is expected to examine the dispositions of his heart, as well as life’s behaviors in an ongoing manner. Thinking in this way, repentance or living a penitential life needs not be identified with a sign of perpetual struggle over sin, but rather a demonstration of spiritual hunger for a pure heart. So, we should join with the palmist David who prayed:

Search me, O God, and know my heart;
test me and know my thoughts.
See if there is any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting
(Psalm 139:23-24).

Contrary to the hyper-grace message, penitential life marks the individual as a believer. By living a penitential life, a believer enters into an lifelong journey of cultivating the renewed relationship with God and, consequently, aspires to fulfill God’s call to holiness. So, Gause rightly points out, “The commitments made upon our first turning to the Lord must be followed through and become the manner in which one lives in covenant with God and the rest of the body of Christ.”¹

3. The Way of Salvation

Another peril with the Hyper-Grace Movement is that its proponents tend to view salvation from the standpoint of eternal security advocating an extremist view of the “once-for-all finished work” of Jesus Christ. Salvation so understood results in the undermining of the ongoing work of the Spirit as inconsequential. Furthermore, salvation is narrowly defined as a single event, rather than a lifelong journey we take in the way of salvation, and the operation of God’s grace to effect salvation is understood as the irresistible and unilateral move of God that renders useless any of our responsive participation in the way of salvation. For hyper-grace proponents, what Jesus has accomplished at the cross was the “finished, perfected, and purifying” act of grace that has not only redeemed us but, in reality, also made us “perfect” at the same time.² In short, nothing more is needed except having the initial faith in what God has already done in Jesus Christ.

The view of salvation propagated by the Hyper-Grace Movement presents a number of problems. For the hyper-grace proponents, grace is understood exclusively as *what God does for us*. Furthermore, they seem to construe grace solely on the basis of God’s sovereign power. The upshot of this is that salvation is what God determines for us out of His sovereign power and has no regard to human response or participation in the process. This is contrary to the salvation narratives articulated in the Scriptures. There

1 R. Hollis Gause, *Living in the Spirit: The Way of Salvation*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2009), 27.

2 Trevor Grizzle, “The Hyper-Grace Gospel,” *The Truth about Grace: Spirit-Empowered Perspective*, Vinson Synan, ed. (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2018), 39



is certainly no question that God's grace provides the infrastructure for our salvation. Without God's grace, sinful humanity is without the capacity to redeem ourselves; to this extent, the view of "works-righteousness" should be rejected. However, if the redemptive story of Jesus Christ is the foundation of our salvation, it speaks of salvation in terms of God's love toward us, rather than what God has chosen to do out of God's sovereign power. As we know, love, by nature, is relational. Love does not overpower but is always inviting of the other to respond in kind. Thinking in this way, rooted in love, God's grace does *not coerce, but enables us to respond* to the invitation of salvation. In this, God's grace goes before human response and enables us so that we can respond to the invitation of God's salvation. With the prevenient grace of God, we are enabled, not coerced, to respond positively to the relationship of love God extends at the moment of our salvation. We should, therefore, hold the two truths in a vital tension: "Without God's grace, we *cannot* be saved; while without our participation, God's grace *will not save*".³ God's grace is the very foundation that makes human salvation possible; however, God does not coerce His way to save us, but enables us by His grace (i.e., prevenient grace). The salvation of God that the Scripture teaches us is essentially rooted in God's love toward humanity; as such, it is *relational* in nature. It is not a story of power or coercion, but that of love and response.

The once-for-all finished view of salvation, propagated by the Hyper-Grace Movement, also regards salvation as a matter of

"transfer" from one location to another. Thinking in this direction, they conflate sanctification with justification. This view rejects the doctrine of subsequence that regards sanctification as the work of God's enabling grace distinguished from the initial salvation (i.e. justification, adoption, and regeneration). The Church of God Declaration of Faith, however, states that "We believe . . . in sanctification *subsequent* to the new birth, through faith in the blood of Christ; through the Word, and by the Holy Ghost" (see Romans 5:2-5; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 13:12).

By conflating sanctification with the initial salvation, the proponents of the Hyper-Grace Movement make sanctification neither distinct nor essential in the life of a believer. To some extent, it becomes a simple matter of getting used to the idea of having been justified. Do the scriptural narratives support this idea? Let's take the Exodus story, for example. When the people of Israel were led by Moses and crossed the Red Sea, God did not take them immediately to the Promised Land. Instead, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years. As Stephen recounts the salvation history of Israel, although they were out of the land of Egypt, "in their hearts they turned back to Egypt" (Acts 7:39). The forty years of wandering in the wilderness were instrumental for them so that they might learn what it meant to become the covenanted people of God.

The Exodus story is likened to the journey of salvation. That we have been

3 Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 19



delivered from the life of sin and death does not automatically and, at the same time, make us perfect before God. As John reminds us, having fellowship with God who is light, we become liars unless we actually do what is true by *walking in the light* (see 1 John 1:5-7). In a similar thought, Paul also encourages us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (see Philippians 2:12) and testifies:

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize for the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (3:12-14 NKJV).

Salvation is a journey we take with Christ, just as the Israelites journeyed with God in the wilderness for forty years. Journey is an indispensable part of what it means to be saved. Along the way, we become strengthened by God's grace which visits us in the power of His Spirit. This is how the Israelites experienced the God of salvation who was ever faithful and, at the end, took them into the Promised Land. In a similar way, God strengthens us by the power of the Spirit as we journey with Him in salvation. It is through this journey that we experience God as a wonderful mystery and are made perfect in His love. Being justified by God's grace should not be the end, in and of itself, but we should anticipate transformative results thereafter.

Being justified by faith places us at the starting line to journey with Christ, with a new direction and aspiration to live our lives in response to the grace given. So, being justified by faith (see Romans 5:1), we ought to stand firmly on the grace of Jesus Christ and join with Paul who testifies:

We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. And not only that, but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us (5:2-5).

Concluding Thoughts

It is troubling to learn that the Hyper-Grace Movement is gaining popularity among pastors and lay leaders. The hyper-grace message is neither rooted in a sound biblical exegesis nor does it provide a coherent theological understanding regarding the nature of God's grace and its operation in human salvation. Hence, it certainly behooves us to take seriously the doctrinal errors of the hyper-grace message and consider its perilous effects that deteriorate our Christian faith and make obsolete core spiritual practices.

As noted earlier, the proponents of the Hyper-Grace Movement misconstrue the nature and function of freedom in the life of a believer. It is true that believers have been freed from the life of sin and death by the reconciling work of Jesus Christ; however, this power of freedom is given with a purpose. That is, the power of freedom is to



enable believers to pursue the life of holiness. Being no longer bound by the power of sin and death but given freedom from it, we are to exercise the freedom and work out our salvation by walking in the light. So, we are told in 1 John 1:6-7: “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (NKJV).

The freedom that God’s redeeming grace provides is not a license to sin. We take for granted God’s amazing grace if we say that we are saved by His grace but yet do not respond to, and act positively with, such grace that results in effecting changes in our hearts and lives. Believers are to work in collaboration with the continuous operation of God’s grace that the Spirit leads in transforming them. For this reason, as noted earlier, Paul commands us to strive toward attaining “the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13). This includes, as the psalmist reminds us, delighting in the law and meditating on it day and night (see Psalm 1:2), because the law is written by none other than the very finger of God—the Holy Spirit (see Exodus 31:18). Being now rooted in Christ, the law no longer condemns us, but propels us to pursue a holy and righteous living with godly fear and trembling. Since the Day of Pentecost, the law of God is no longer carved in stone tablets but in the hearts of believers as the Spirit is being poured out upon them. The outpouring of the Spirit then leads believers to be empowered to love God with a wholehearted surrender of hearts and lives.

We should note further that salvation is not a mere event, but a journey we take in and with Jesus Christ. Being initiated into the way of salvation by the redeeming blood of Jesus Christ, believers are encouraged and empowered to do good works which result in deepening our love relationship with God. Our ability to do good works is not rooted in any inherent power within us but provided by God’s grace; it is God’s grace that empowers us to do that which is good in God’s sight. As we respond positively to God’s enabling grace, our love relationship with Jesus Christ gets deepened beyond the initial moment of our faith. Insofar as love is relational, and love defines who God is and how God relates with us (see 1 John 4:7-13), the salvation of God *cannot be deterministic but must be dynamic* in nature. In other words, God does not force His way into our lives, but patiently awaits and invites us to a relationship of love. God loved us by His Son, Jesus Christ, by whom He reconciled and redeemed us from the life of sin. The provision of God’s grace in this way has enabled us to respond favorably to the wonder and mystery of His love toward us. Furthermore, as believers, we now testify of the ongoing operation of God’s grace throughout the life journey of a believer as we acknowledge and respond in gratitude to the workings of the Holy Spirit of God who admonishes, examines, instructs, and inspires believers. It is in our *grace-enabled* striving to “be filled up to all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:19 NASB) that we are led to know the *truly* wondrous mystery of God’s salvation. ■

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LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

TIM HILL, GENERAL OVERSEER

Addicted to Applause

Several years ago, while attending a conference, I listened as the keynote speaker* addressed the addictive nature of applause. In his message, he made the following observations about applause and a leader's propensity to become addicted to it:

1. What is applauded as exceptional the first time will be expected the next.
2. Those most applauded feel the most entitled.
3. Applause is intoxicating, and "applause-intoxicated" people do not make good decisions.
4. Applause is addictive. We start looking for it, and we will even manufacture it.

For a while after hearing this pastor's presentation, I went into a deep dive of reflection and introspection. In other words, I did some self-inventory and asked myself the question, "To what degree have I been affected by the applause of others?"

I don't personally know of anyone who doesn't like or even enjoy the positive feedback and response from those to whom they speak or sing. Some absorb applause like a sponge. On the other hand, some take it in stride, while others struggle to receive even the slightest of compliments.

It certainly feels good when people express to a minister how good a sermon was, or how inspiring a vision is, and even how valuable a person's leadership may be to the organization. In and of itself, praise and affirmation isn't wrong. In fact, praise

is a healthy part of building and encouraging anyone. Everybody needs encouragement, but something dangerous happens when applause is craved and sought after. In our human way of thinking, we conclude that we have worked hard and at the very least, small tributes to our efforts certainly seem appropriate. However, Jesus warned about the danger of doing anything only for the affirmation of men when He said, "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1 NIV). Indeed, applause is a sincere way to affirm an individual for anything done that is praiseworthy, but leaders must keep applause and public affirmation in the right perspective. The truth is . . . applause can indeed become addictive.

In the world of addictions, the addiction to applause is seldom listed, yet it is subtle and can be very consuming. Applause has a seducing power, as well as it has the ability to move an individual away from speaking truth, while luring him or her into speaking what is merely appealing or popular.

Applause is pervasive, and we live in a culture that wants to applaud every single thing we do. Applause can be intoxicating and exhilarating, supplying a quick rush of worth and affirmation, and it comes in all kinds of forms. It comes in the form of the clapping of hands during a song or sermon, but it also can come in the form of the



“like” or “heart” symbol following a post on social media.

Positive responses like these can bring about affirming, though temporary, feelings of acceptance. If a person isn't careful, applause and various symbols of social media acceptance will become a person's vanity metric by which they judge their acceptance among their public. How often are you keeping check on the number of “likes” and “shares” that your media posts are receiving? This may be a sign of how affected you have become by the need for applause.

Conversely, applause can even be a vicious master just like any addiction requiring a person to have a steady fix in order to maintain the high that it brings. Paul G. Simone, Ph.D., Medical Director of Behavioral Health at Lee Health Institute wrote, “There is growing evidence to suggest that some individuals can develop a dependency on social media that's not unlike an addiction to alcohol or drugs.”*

Applause is what it is, but being addicted to it causes a person to be at the mercy of popular opinion, yielding to the temptation of allowing what others think to take prominence over what is true and right. A person who is addicted to applause will often play to the crowd even if it means sacrificing the principles of doing what is right.

So, where is the balance and how does a minister and leader avoid applause addiction and its dominance of one's life? We must embrace the “applause” standard found in scripture.

In I Corinthians 4:5, the apostle Paul wrote about that awesome moment that's coming when we stand before God. Paul wrote, “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness,

and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (KJV). This verse clearly reveals that the secrets and motivations of the heart will be made known as you stand before God on that day.

Take note of the last phrase of I Corinthians 4:5. It is most significant. It reads, *“Then shall every man have praise of God.”*

The word “praise” is translated from the Greek word *“epainos,”* which actually means applause. Paul used the word *“epainos”* to convey the image that on that day, if we have lived right before God, we will receive praise (applause) from the Lord Himself. It will be as if He rises to His feet to give a round of applause and a standing ovation.

Much of the work and preparation we do unto the Lord is done in secret with little or no applause in this life. When things are attempted and accomplished for Him, most people are often unaware of our actions or simply fail to show appreciation. However, according to Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 4:5, a day will come when God Himself will personally rise and thank you for everything you have done in the name of Jesus for the sake of the Gospel.

In its place, applause is an expression of appreciation and should be received for what it is. It shouldn't be expected and certainly not demanded. If someone does this, then they have become addicted to it. May we live and minister as unto the Lord and be free from any possible dependency on the applause of those around us. Remember that the praise, accolades, and the applause of people around us is very short-lived and soon forgotten, but the applause of God lasts for all eternity. ■

Sources: *A. Stanley, P. Simone

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MATTHEW 28:19



KID MISSION SUNDAY

MARCH 12, 2023

Children are encouraged to be a part of changing Latin America through simple acts of collecting pocket change. On KidMission Sunday, March 12th, everyone will bring their change and donations to church to show a unified effort that they want to participate in this year's mission to change the world for the children of Latin America!

THE YWEA 2023 PROJECT "CONEXIÓN-CONNECTED TO THE COMMISSION" IS AN INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH THE LATIN AMERICAN CULTURE AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE BY FOCUSING ON THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIC MINISTRIES:

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- Ministry Training Centers in Guatemala & Brazil

Want to receive reserved Kidfest seating? The church in each state/region raising the largest offering above \$600.00 will receive reserved seating at the Kidfest they attend. However, in order to qualify, they must report the offering to their state/regional office on Monday, March 13th, and the offering must be received by the state/regional office Friday, March 17th. Then, this must be reported by the state/regional office to the Kidfest office by Monday, March 20th. There will be no exceptions to this process.

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Church of God HIGHLIGHTS

*Abbreviated news from faithnews.cc between
September 1 and December 15, 2022*



Members of the 2022–2024 International Executive Council.

Seated, L-R: Gary J. Lewis, Raymond F. Culpepper, Timothy M. Hill, Tony D. Stewart, David E. Ramírez. Second Row: David Cooper, Mark Leonhardt, Stafford Petersen, Rick Whitter, Kenneth Hill, Anthony Pelt, Ángel Marcial, Nick Park, Lennox Walker, Kenneth Anderson. Top Row: R.C. Hugh Nelson, Timothy Brown, Scott Sheppard, David Smith, Kip Box, William Lee, Joe Dobbins, Kelvin Page, Julio Meléndez.)

International Executive Council Convenes First Gathering

September 29, 2022—Cleveland, TN—Members of the 2022–2024 International Executive Council gathered for their first official meeting of this Assembly period earlier this week at the International Headquarters of the Church of God.

The new members of the Council of Eighteen—fifteen of whom have never previously served on the Council—were joined by the five members of the Executive Committee, as well as Stafford Petersen, overseer

of the South Africa Full Gospel Church. The body of leaders comprises the International Executive Council.

The Council of Eighteen, as well as the Executive Committee, were elected at the 78th General Assembly of the Church of God held in San Antonio this past July. Previous members of the Council of Eighteen were deemed to have served their full tenures based upon the two extra years due to the postponement of the 2020 Assembly because of the pandemic.

The two-day gathering consisted of appointed Committee meetings prior to the official convening of the session on



September 27. Members received updates on divisional ministries of the Church from members of the Executive Committee, heard financial reports, and posed for their official group photograph. General Overseer Tim Hill shared his vision for the next two years—*Harvest Commission 2024*—and also moderated the gathering. On Tuesday night, the Council attended the induction of Dr. French Arrington into the Hall of Prophets at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary.

The Council of Eighteen consists of ministry leaders, representing not less than twelve pastors and two representatives from outside the United States.

The Executive Council will next meet by Zoom in January 2023.

Lee University Commemorates Dual Anniversaries

October 20, 2022—Cleveland, TN—An intimate gathering of church, community, and Lee University representatives gathered on the Lee campus on October 19 to mark both 25 years of university status and 75 years since the school's return to Cleveland, Tennessee.

Founded more than a century ago on January 1, 1918, Lee University began as Bible Training School on the second floor of the Evangel Publishing Co. located on Gaut Street in Cleveland. The fledgling school quickly outgrew their space and operated out of multiple sites in Cleveland for its first 20 years. In 1938, the Church of God purchased the former campus of Murphy Collegiate Institute in

Sevierville, Tennessee. BTS faculty, staff, and students relocated to the sprawling campus that fell and remained in the East Tennessee town for the next nine years.

In 1947, an opportunity arose for the Church of God school to relocate back to their headquarters city. At that time, the current Lee campus was occupied by Bob Jones College, a fundamentalist school that had been on the site since purchasing it from the Holston Conference of the United Methodist Church, which had operated Centenary Female College there from 1885–1928. By 1947, Bob Jones had outgrown the campus, following a period of enrollment increases and new construction, including several buildings still in use by Lee today.

Purchasing the campus for \$1.5 million, BTS relocated to Cleveland in the fall of 1947 and adopted the name Lee College, honoring the school's second president and former Church of God General Overseer, Flavius Josephus Lee. During the May 1997 commencement weekend, Lee College officially transitioned to become Lee University.

The Wednesday, October 19 luncheon was held in the Centenary Room, the only portion of the original Centenary College still in use. The event was designed as a reminiscence and “thank you” to Cleveland and Bradley County community leaders and businesses that have supported Lee University through the years. Guests included bank presidents, industry leaders, church officials, and Lee personnel, including President



Mark Walker who opened the gathering with a greeting and prayer.

Featured speakers were former Lee president Dr. Paul Conn and Beecher Hunter, retired president of Life Care Centers of America and former editor of the *Cleveland Daily Banner*. Conn described his earliest memories growing up in Cleveland, attending local schools, joining the Lee faculty in 1972, and assuming the presidency in 1986 where he led it for 32 years.

Petersen Elected Moderator of Full Gospel Church of God



Hill, Propes, and Childers are joined by the newly elected South African leaders (L-R) Stafford Petersen (Moderator), Renier Pelser (Secretary General), Isaac Mufamadi (First Deputy Moderator), Dirk Enslin (Second Deputy Moderator), Petrus Calitz (Third Deputy Moderator)

October 26, 2022—South Africa—

Dr. Stafford Petersen was recently reelected to serve as moderator for the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa.

Petersen was elected during the church's general conference being conducted this week in South Africa. By virtue of his election, Petersen will continue

to serve as a member of the Church of God International Executive Council.

"All thanks goes to God my father for His grace, His mercy, and His protection," Stafford told the delegates of the conference upon his confirmation on the first ballot. "Forward we will go to the most High God."

"Brother Peterson leads a tremendous ministry of more than 1,400 churches and ministries throughout South Africa," stated Church of God General Overseer Tim Hill. "I commend and congratulate him, as well as the other members of the South Africa Executive Committee on their elections to return for new terms of service."

Hill was a featured speaker during the opening night of this week's conference on October 24. He and his wife, Paula, were in attendance along with other Church of God leaders, including Dr. M. Thomas Propes, General Director of World Missions and Dr. John D. Childers, Assistant Director of World Missions.

World Missions Launches Church Planting and Revitalization Effort

November 8, 2022—Cleveland, TN—Church of God World Missions today announced the formation of a Church Planting and Church Revitalization Initiative outside the United States and Canada.

"If we are going to see a worldwide harvest of souls, we must do everything within our power to plant life-giving churches. Church of God World Missions is



committed to not only planting new churches, but also to revitalizing and bringing new life into existing congregations. With churches in 186 countries of the world, we must seize every opportunity to reach those who have not yet accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Additionally, we must strategically concentrate our efforts in areas where the name of Jesus Christ has never been heard," stated Director Propes.

World Missions Church Planting and Revitalization effort is a part of the "365 Challenge" launched at the 2022 International General Assembly and will be structured by, and under the direction of, the five World Missions field directors. Goals and objectives for the different areas of the world, along with the strategies for each, will be drafted and implemented by Church of God World Missions ministry teams.

In commending this initiative, Dr. Timothy M. Hill, General Overseer of the Church of God and liaison to Church of God World Missions, stated, "World Missions is a vital part of the 'Finish Commission—Harvest' effort. Our joint commitment to church planting and revitalization will help us reach our goal of carrying the Gospel to all corners of the world."

PTS Ranked Among Nation's Best Schools for Online Education

November 9, 2022—Cleveland, TN—The Pentecostal Theological Seminary, a graduate-level institution of the Church of God, has been ranked one of

the nation's best schools for online counseling education degrees and certificates for 2023.

The PTS counseling degree is the Master of Arts in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (MACMHC). The independent ranking was done by EduMed, which ranks healthcare and related educational programs.

PTS was ranked in the category, Best Online Counseling Degree Programs. Click [here](#) to view the full results. It was also ranked in the "Most Affordable Online Counseling Master's Degrees."

The mission of EduMed.org is: "To educate the public and provide reliable resources to those looking to start or advance their healthcare education."

Wes Harris, outreach coordinator for EduMed.org said, "Congratulations to all those at Pentecostal Theological Seminary! Our annual rankings have recently been released and your school is one of the nation's premier institutions providing a top counseling program going into 2023."

Dr. Michael L. Baker, PTS President, said, "The PTS counseling program not only provides premier educational services, but a common denominator is our commitment to accomplish that goal in the 'Spirit and Power of Pentecost.'" ■

(Source: Pentecostal Theological Seminary)

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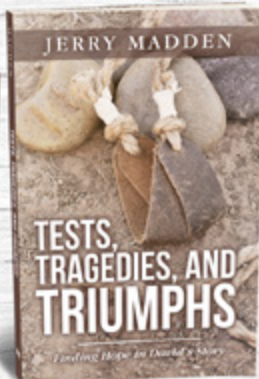
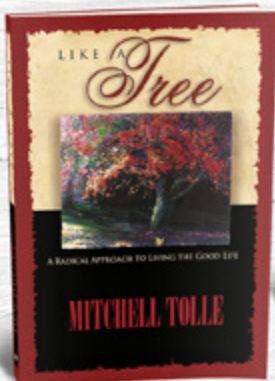
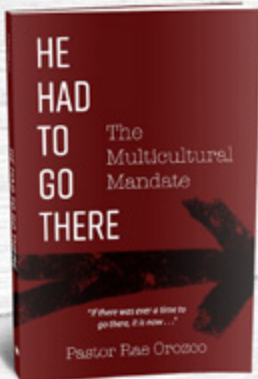
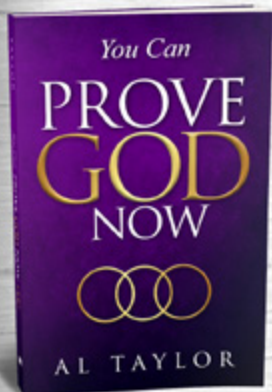
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