



The Sabbath Watchman

July-August 2015

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Righteousness Exalts a Nation

Benjamin Franklin, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, stated during the Continental Congress of 1778, "Only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.... True religion and good morals are the only solid foundations of public liberty and happiness."

Twenty years later, **John Adams**, second President of the United States, in a speech to the military, warned his fellow countrymen with these words: "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

Noah Webster, author of the first *American Speller* and the first "American" Dictionary of 1828 said, "The Christian religion, in its purity, is the basis, or rather the source, of all genuine freedom in government,... and I am persuaded that no civil government of a republican form can exist and be durable in which the principles of that religion have not a controlling influence."

Benjamin Rush, another signer of the Declaration of Independence, said, "The only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments."

The pendulum of liberal ideas has swung far to the left, to the point of placing marriage, the first institution of God, in the dustbin of time. Now, with the upcoming visit of the Pope, will the pendulum swing to the right and do the same to the second institution—the holy Sabbath day? If so, are we ready for the last act in the drama of the ages? As you read the articles in this issue, consider the above quotations and also the following statements.

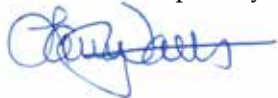
"When Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with Spiritualism, when, under the influence of this threefold union, our country shall repudiate every principle of its Constitution as a Protestant and Republican government, and shall make provision for the propagation of papal falsehoods and delusions, then we may know that the time has come for the marvelous working of Satan, and that the end is near....

"The time is not far distant, when, like the early disciples, we shall be forced to seek a refuge in desolate and solitary places. As the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman armies was the signal for flight to the Judean Christians, so the assumption of power on the part of our nation, in the decree enforcing the papal sabbath, will be a warning to us. It will then be time to leave the large cities, preparatory to leaving the smaller ones for retired homes in secluded places among the mountains....

"When our nation shall so abjure the principles of its government as to enact a Sunday law, Protestantism will in this act join hands with popery; it will be nothing else than giving life to the tyranny which has long been eagerly watching its opportunity to spring again into active despotism." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 451, 464, 465, 712.

"The substitution of the laws of men for the law of God, the exaltation, by merely human authority, of Sunday in place of the Bible Sabbath, is the last act in the drama. When this substitution becomes universal, God will reveal Himself. He will arise in His majesty to shake terribly the earth. He will come out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity, and the earth shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain." —*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 141.

"National apostasy is the signal for national ruin." —*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 372.



*"Righteousness
exalteth a nation: but
sin is a reproach to
any people."
Proverbs 14:34.*

Beacon of hope, faith, and truth in a confused world.

We believe:

- The all-wise, loving God created all things in the universe by His Son, Jesus Christ; He is its Owner and Sustainer.
- He met the challenge to His loving leadership and authority by reconciling the world to Himself through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, the Word made flesh.
- The Holy Spirit, Jesus' representative on earth, convicts of sin, guides into truth, and, when abiding in man, overcomes all unrighteousness.
- The Bible is the record of God's dealings with mankind and the standard of all doctrine; the Ten Commandments are the transcript of His character and the foundation of all enduring reform.
- His people, in harmony with God's Word and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, call all men everywhere to be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus.
- Bible prophecy reveals that earth's history will soon close with the visible return of Jesus Christ as King to claim all who have accepted Him as the world's only Redeemer and their Lord.

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A Tribute to America

The Biblical Roots of the First Document and the First President



By Idel Suarez, Jr.

*"Beware that thou
forget not the
Lord thy God, in
not keeping His
commandments, and
His judgments, and
His statutes, which I
command thee
this day."
Deuteronomy 8:11.*

July 4 is the anniversary and birthday of the United States of America. On this date back in 1776, the representatives from the thirteen American Colonies, extending from New Hampshire in the north to Georgia in the south, ratified the Declaration of Independence.

Woodrow Wilson, who lived in Augusta, Georgia, during the Civil War and grew up to become President of Princeton University and President of the United States during World War I, made the following statement regarding the importance of knowing the history of America:

"A nation which does not remember what it was yesterday, does not know what it is today, nor what it is trying to do. We are trying to do a futile thing if we do not know where we came from or what we have been about."¹

The admonition of President Wilson, who was an avid reader of the Bible and son of a Presbyterian minister, sounds like the words of Moses to Israel. President Wilson's words are an admonition to every American to stop for a moment and review the history of this great country which God so bountifully blessed.

"Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping His commandments, and His judgments, and His statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein; And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; Who led thee through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought thee forth water out of the rock of flint; Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that He might humble thee, and that He might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end." Deuteronomy 8:11-16.

The Continental Congress elected a committee of three to write the Declaration of Independence: Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and Benjamin Franklin. They represented Virginia, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania—a southern, a northern, and a middle state—respectively.

Back in 1876, James and Ellen G. White, prominent pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist

Church, made it a point to be in Philadelphia for the Centennial Celebration of the Declaration of Independence. President Ulysses S. Grant participated in the celebration. Over 500 acres were set aside for a grand exhibition to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. It was like a grand expo. James was so impressed that he published these words in the *Review and Herald*:

"People abroad have no just idea of the greatness, gorgeousness, and perfection of the Centennial Exhibition. The newspapers can't tell it."²

Some years ago, my family and I had the opportunity to visit Philadelphia and see the restored Independence Hall, where the Declaration of Independence was signed. My daughters were able to visit with actors who impersonated Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson. We even visited the room on an upper floor of a house within walking distance of Independence Hall where the tall, slender, red-haired Thomas Jefferson wrote the rough draft of the Declaration of Independence. It was here that Franklin and Adams would drop in to give their comments and encourage the young writer to continue his task. One can see the many pages which were thrown into the wastebasket as he perfected this document.

Once approved by the state delegates, the Declaration of Independence was signed by fifty-six courageous, rich, influential men on July 4, 1776. Do you know what became of them?

"Five were captured by the British and tortured before they died. Twelve had their homes, from Rhode Island to Charleston, sacked, looted, occupied by the enemy, or burned. Two lost their sons in the army. One had two sons captured. Nine of the fifty-six died in the war, from its hardships or from its bullets."³

During the American Revolutionary War, those who supported King George in England were called Tories. They would mark their homes as such so that when the British soldiers would come by, the homes would not be burned. It was like the scene related in the book of Exodus in which homes where Israelites had marked their door posts with blood would not suffer the death of their firstborn by the avenging angel. In this case, the homes not marked as

belonging to Tories were burned or sacked by the British army.

When the Declaration of Independence was preliminarily approved, John Adams wrote a letter to his wife, Abigail, in which he acknowledged God's intervention in delivering America from an empire that was much stronger than the Colonies. He called for not just parades and fireworks but also for "solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty."

"My Dear,

"Yesterday the greatest question was decided which ever was debated in America.... I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival. It ought to be commemorated as the day of deliverance by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows..., bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other from this time forward forevermore."⁴

Please allow me to refer to a few relevant statements generally quoted and some very important statements in the Declaration of Independence which are frequently overlooked.

The introduction to the Declaration of Independence acknowledges God's sovereignty and the absolute laws of nature. It declares that nature is dependent on God.

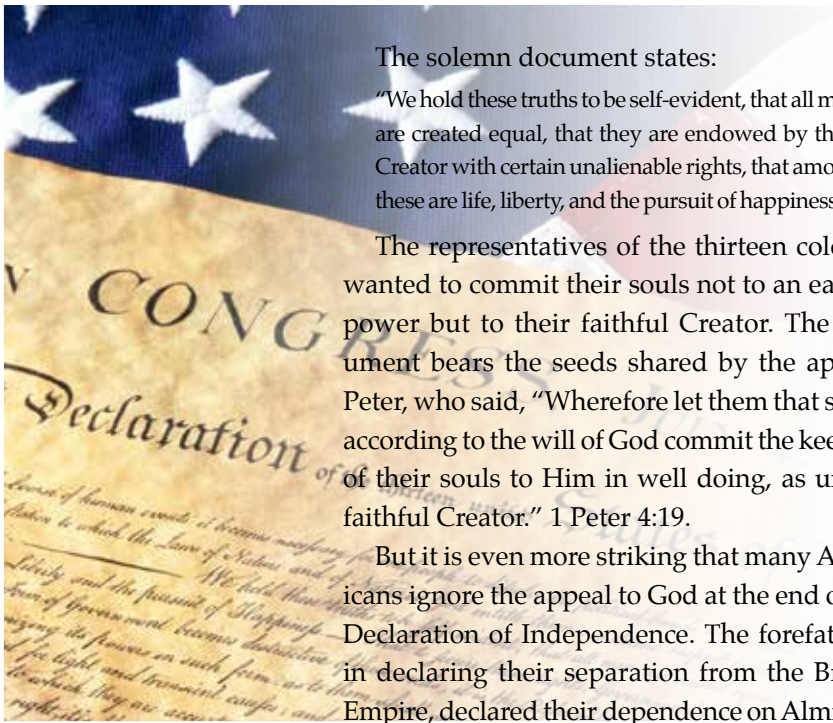
"When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve their political bands ... with another, and to assume ... the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and Nature's God entitle them,... they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."⁵

Furthermore, the signers of the Declaration of Independence said they believed in creation. They recognized that they were created by the Creator and spelled Creator with a capital "C."

Sister White referred to the Declaration of Independence as "that grand old document which our forefathers set forth as their bill of rights—the Declaration of Independence," which upheld creation and religious liberty.⁶ She wrote, "The Declaration of Independence ... sets forth the great truth that 'all men are created equal,' and endowed with the unalienable right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'"⁷

The introduction to the Declaration of Independence acknowledges God's sovereignty and the absolute laws of nature.





The solemn document 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."⁸

The representatives of the thirteen colonies wanted to commit their souls not to an earthly power but to their faithful Creator. The document bears the seeds shared by the apostle Peter, who said, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator." 1 Peter 4:19.

But it is even more striking that many Americans ignore the appeal to God at the end of the Declaration of Independence. The forefathers, in declaring their separation from the British Empire, declared their dependence on Almighty God. They appealed to the Supreme Judge of the world. They recognized implicitly that there will be a day of reckoning and judgment, a day in which all must give account of their actions.

"We, therefore, the Representatives of the United States of America, in General Congress assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world,... solemnly publish and declare: That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, Free and Independent States."⁹

Does this not sound like the words of the apostle Paul: "Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead." Acts 17:31.

The framers of the Declaration wanted to be free. This was the message of Jesus in the gospels. He said, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." John 8:32, 36.

Furthermore, in its last sentence, the Declaration of Independence appeals again to God as "divine Providence." The framers attested to their independence from the British but their dependence upon God and His protection as they pursued an unknown course as a new nation.

"And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor."¹⁰

Jefferson referred to the "divine Providence" written with capital "P." This was similar to the words of the apostle Peter who spoke of "divine power" and life, glory, and virtue. "According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue." 2 Peter 1:3.

A few years later, when representatives met in Philadelphia again—to draft, sign, and seal the Constitution of the United States of America, the following story is told.

"A lady sidled up to old Ben Franklin. 'Well, Dr. Franklin. What have you given us?' 'You have a republic, madame. If you can keep it.'"¹¹

George Washington

Just as the Declaration of Independence is the country's first major document as a new nation, so General George Washington was its first President. How did he stand with respect to the Bible and Christianity?

While the delegates assembled in Philadelphia wrote and signed the Declaration of Independence, General George Washington was on the battleground in New York getting ready to fight the British. George Washington was, in the famous words of Harry Lee: "First in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen."¹²

Sister White makes reference to Washington and attributes his success to his mother, who instilled in him Christian virtues. Sister White compared the training of George Washington to "the training which the mother of Samuel gave her son, which developed in him sterling moral worth, which connected him with God."

"The training which the mother of Samuel gave her son, developed in him sterling moral worth, which connected him with God. If the mother of Washington had been a frivolous character,... her son George would not have become a man of firm will and moral power. His mother gave him the lessons which he carried into practical life. She inspired him with principles of stern integrity that would not be bribed."¹³

General Washington would invest from his own pocket over \$160,000 to the Revolutionary War effort. He did not request any salary for his

The framers of the Declaration wanted to be free. This was the message of Jesus in the gospels.

labor, but just reimbursement for his expenses. "In 1783, he submitted his expense report." In today's funds, it would be equal to millions of dollars.¹⁴

In 1891, the personal prayer book of George Washington was discovered among a collection of his papers. It was handwritten by George Washington himself. It is tangible proof that he was a believing, professing Christian. He saw himself as a sinner. He saw Jesus Christ as his personal Saviour. Washington confessed his sins to God by the merits of Jesus Christ and had morning and evening prayers. He read and quoted the gospels. Read his profound Christian conviction in his prayer to the God of the Bible:

"O most Glorious God, in Jesus Christ my merciful and loving Father, I acknowledge and confess my guilt, in the weak and imperfect performance of the duties of this day. I have called on Thee for pardon and forgiveness of sins,...

"Let me live according to those holy rules which Thou hast ... prescribed.... Help me thoroughly to examine myself concerning my knowledge, faith and repentance, increase my faith, direct me to the true object, Jesus Christ the Way, the Truth and the Life.

"Bless, O Lord, all the people of this land, from the highest to the lowest, particularly those whom Thou has appointed to rule over us in church and state.... These weak petitions I humbly implore Thee to hear, accept and answer for the sake of Thy Dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen."¹⁵

What a joy as an American, as a Christian, to read the prayer of George Washington from his private study. He clearly believed and professed that "the true object [of life], [is] Jesus Christ the Way, the Truth and the Life." He believed in having "faith" in Jesus and believed in "repentance" from sin. I wish every reader and American to follow the example of George Washington and the grand truths expressed in the Declaration of Independence.

Washington received a copy of the Declaration of Independence a few days after July 4. He immediately gathered his soldiers and had a copy of it read aloud to all. He wanted to instill in them that they were created and, thus, accountable to the Creator and Supreme Judge on the last day.¹⁶

In His farewell speech to the nation in 1797, President George Washington made a solemn appeal like Moses did to the Israelites. Washing-

ton offered some words in parting as a friend from political and public life.

"These will be offered to you ... as ... the disinterested warnings of a parting friend.... Observe faith and justice towards all nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all. Religion and morality enjoin this conduct."¹⁷

And then, he gave a solemn warning:

"Can it be, that Providence has not connected the permanent felicity of a nation with its virtue?... Alas it is rendered impossible by its vices."¹⁸

Washington knew that virtue brings only happiness and prosperity to a nation, while vices bring disaster. The wise Solomon wrote a similar statement 3,000 years ago. "Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." Proverbs 14:34.

The testimony of Moses in Washington, DC

In his famous appeal to Israel, Moses warned Israel about the consequences of forgetting God and attributing all the success to themselves.

"And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroyeth before your face, so shall ye perish; because ye would not be obedient unto the voice of the Lord your God." Deuteronomy 8:19, 20.

Come with me for a moment to Washington, DC, and its grand chamber of the Supreme Court. As you enter notice that the two huge oak doors are engraved with two tablets bearing the Roman numerals I through X. On its east front, the marble sculpture of Moses appears among the great lawgivers. Moses with his long beard is holding the Ten Commandments.¹⁹

Has the Supreme Court turned its back on God's Holy Book and Law? Is the Supreme Court upholding virtue or vice? Is it judging according to the Ten Commandments, which is the legacy of the Bible, or is it legislating humanistic laws?

Review with me a few monumental decisions made by a few judges sitting on the highest court of the land, which was to uphold the grand

In his famous appeal to Israel, Moses warned Israel about the consequences of forgetting God and attributing all the success to themselves.



Israel ended up being in desolation, because the nation traded virtue for vice. They made it the new judgment and law of the land.

truths of the Declaration of Independence and to judge justly between “virtue” and “vice,” according to the statement of George Washington.

In 1963, the Supreme Court, in *Abington Township School District v. Schempp*, declared that “Bible reading and recitation of the Lord’s Prayer” were “unconstitutional” in public schools.

In 1973, the Supreme Court, in *Roe v. Wade*, withdrew the right to life from the unborn.

Now, in 2015, on June 26, the Supreme Court in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, redefined marriage, opposing the definition of the Bible. Marriage in America is no longer exclusively limited to a man and a woman.

The Supreme Court of the nation is now legislating new laws redefining virtue and vice. Chief Justice John Roberts in his dissenting comments said, “Do not celebrate the Constitution. It had nothing to do with it.”²⁰

What will the next ruling from five justices be?

The warning and call of Micah

The prophet Micah’s words should be meditated upon as we celebrate the Fourth of July this year in the light of the past Christian heritage and new humanistic court decisions. “Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand.” Micah 2:1.

Micah spoke to the supreme justices of Israel in his day and wondered how they could not distinguish in judgment between good and evil—how they could love evil. “And I said, Hear, I pray you, O heads of Jacob, and ye princes of the house of Israel; Is it not for you to know judgment? Who hate the good, and love the evil?” Micah 3:1, 2.

Micah declared that the nation had made up its own commandments contrary to God’s law. He called them the “statutes of Omri.” Omri taught Israel to follow pagan laws. Israel was following a new, ungodly counsel. “For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab, and ye walk in their counsels;

that I should make thee a desolation, and the inhabitants thereof an hissing: therefore ye shall bear the reproach of My people.” Micah 6:16.

Israel ended up being in desolation, because the nation traded virtue for vice. They made it the new judgment and law of the land.

History and archaeology attest to the fact that, when nations forget morals and redefine vice as virtue, their governments end up in ruins. “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” Proverbs 14:34.

Sin is the transgression of God’s law. Sin is at both ends of the continuum. When the Court seeks to redefine the second tablet of God’s law dealing with the sixth and seventh commandments, that is sin. But sin is also the legislating of laws contrary to the first tablet of God’s law.

Ironically, it may not be the Supreme Court of the nation which will bring about complete apostasy. This swinging of the pendulum toward the left as liberalism will then go to the other side, to the right, as fanatical religious oppression.

Other visionaries have stated that the legislature in America may now seek to overreact and restrict liberty. Once the legislative bodies of this blessed and favored nation seek to repeat the history of the papal religious intolerance of the past by dictating laws restricting liberty in the name of virtue, with the wholesome desire to stop vice, then the remedy will be worse than the disease.

Sister White wrote that national apostasy will lead rulers to enact new laws that will lead to national ruin.

“It is at the time of the national apostasy, when, acting on the policy of Satan, the rulers of the land will rank themselves on the side of the man of sin—it is then the measure of guilt is full; the national apostasy is the signal for national ruin.”²¹

“With rapid steps we are approaching this period. When ... churches shall unite with the secular power to sustain a false religion, for opposing which their ancestors endured the fiercest persecution, then will the papal sabbath be enforced by the combined authority of church and state. There will be a national apostasy, which will end only in national ruin.”²²

In light of this, what are we to do individually? Micah’s solemn warning of woe includes a call to individual reflection and repentance.

“He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” Micah 6:8.

We are to humble ourselves before God. We are to love mercy and treat others better than they deserve. We are to act justly, according to God’s law, without legislating religion on others or redefining what the Bible calls sin and vice. We are to live the prayer and counsel of George Washington—to seek an increase of faith, repent, and follow Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is the great object of life.

May there be a new awakening in America. May there arise out of the rubble of confusion from the courts and any reaction from Congress a new desire to search our Christian heritage, Biblical virtues, and God’s holy law by the grace of Jesus Christ.

Postscript

There are some who may claim that the founding fathers were neither Bible believers nor Christians. But if this were so, besides what has already been cited, why did the founding fathers commission a Bible to be printed in America in 1782? Why did they assign two chaplains to review for accuracy the Bible commissioned by Congress? I own a facsimile of the 1782 American Bible, which is a *King James Version* published by Robert Aitken in Philadelphia. In its opening pages, after reporting on the recommendation of the two chaplains, this Bible includes the resolution from the Congress of the United States in 1782:

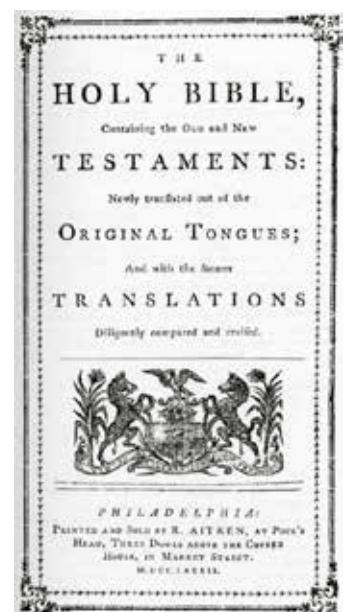
“Resolved, That the United States in Congress assembled highly approve the pious and laudable undertaking of Mr. Aitken, as a subservient to the interest of religion, as well as an influence of the progress of arts in this country, and being satisfied from the above report of his care and accuracy in the execution of the work, they recommend this edition of the Bible to the inhabitants of the United States.”²³

The founding fathers wanted Americans to own and read the Bible and live the virtues and morals taught in it. The Holy Scriptures were thus recommended to “the inhabitants of the United

States.” The Declaration of Independence, as the first official document of the United States of America, and George Washington, as its first President, both had Biblical roots. Should not we? **SW**

- ¹ Woodrow Wilson quoted in *The Rebirth of America*, ed. Nancy Leigh DeMoss (Philadelphia: Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation, 1986), p. 12.
- ² James White, *Review and Herald*, August 10, 1876, in “The Spirit of 1876: A Presentation on Ellen G. White Geared to the Bicentennial,” *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 7 (Silver Spring, MD: E.G. White Estate, 1990), p. 288.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ⁴ John Adams to Abigail Adams, July 3, 1776, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in *Letters of American History: Words to Remember*, ed. H. Jack Lang (New York: Harmony Books, 1982), pp. 24, 25.
- ⁵ Vincent Wilson, Jr., ed., “Declaration of Independence,” *The Book of Great American Documents* (Brooksville, MD: American History Research Associates, 1987), p. 15.
- ⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (1888) (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911), p. 295.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 441.
- ⁸ Vincent Wilson, Jr., ed., “Declaration of Independence,” *The Book of Great American Documents*, p. 15.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- ¹² Tim LaHaye, *Faith of Our Founding Fathers* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, Publishers, Inc., 1987), p. 100.
- ¹³ Ellen G. White, “The Mother’s Influence,” *Health Reformer*, April 1, 1880, par. 4.
- ¹⁴ Nicohas Esguerra, “On July 4, 1776, George Washington Bought a Broom,” *NPR*, July 2, 2015. Accessed July 3, 2015. <http://www.npr.org/sections/money/2012/07/02/155570245/on-july-4-1776-george-washington-bought-a-broom>.
- ¹⁵ Tim LaHaye, *Faith of Our Founding Fathers*, p. 111.
- ¹⁶ <http://www.mountvernon.org/research-collections/digital-encyclopedia/article/declaration-of-independence>. Accessed July 3, 2015.
- ¹⁷ *The Greatest American Speeches* (London: Quercus Publishing Plc, 2008), pp. 21, 22.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ *The Rebirth of America*, pp. 68, 69.
- ²⁰ Jess Bravin, “Court Rules Gays Have Right to Marry,” *The Wall Street Journal*, CCLXV, No. 149, Saturday/Sunday, June 27–28, 2015.
- ²¹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2 (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), p. 372.
- ²² Ellen G. White, *Manuscript 51*, 1899, in *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1946), p. 235.
- ²³ *The Holy Bible*, printer R. Aitken, Philadelphia (1782) (facsimile, Litchfield Park, AR: Pilgrim Walk, 2010).

The founding fathers wanted Americans to own, read, and live the virtues and morals taught in the Holy Scriptures.





Perilous Times

By Antonino Di Franca

On Friday, June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States, the Judicial Branch of the Federal Government that decides whether or not a law is in agreement with the U.S. Constitution, decided that it is legal for two people of the same sex to marry and to have that marriage considered and registered just like a marriage between a man and a woman. While the homosexual groups received the confirmation that they had lobbied for and demanded, inevitably the news echoed around the world, arousing mixed feelings from one country to another.

Before this decision, all matters concerning marriage were considered something that each individual state had the right to decide within its borders. Some states were for and others were against such unions; some were in favor of making homosexual marriages legal, and others were against this. But now every state of the United States, whether the people of that state are in favor of it or not, is bound by law to accept and legalize such homosexual marriage as a legal, normal marriage.

This situation is not new in the U.S. Such unions were granted here and there in recent years, but they were not legal in every state. But these ideas began to make inroads and gradually found acceptance in a growing number of states. Now they are supported by a majority of the nine members of the Supreme Court; the decision of the majority is now forced on every state, even where such laws have never been made.

Enacted into law

While the four justices who opposed this ruling “wrote opinions expressing that it was not the Supreme Court’s place to decide same-sex marriage and it was an overreach of the court’s power,”¹ and “Justice Scalia called the ruling ‘a threat to American democracy,’ ”² the five majority justices prevailed with a completely different attitude. Justice Anthony Kennedy expressed the majority’s opinion, as reported in the following excerpts: “The Constitution promises liberty to all within its reach, a liberty that includes certain specific rights that allow persons, within a lawful realm, to define

and express their identity. The petitioners in these cases seek to find that liberty by marrying someone of the same sex and having their marriages deemed lawful on the same terms and conditions as marriages between persons of the opposite sex.”³

“No union is more profound than marriage, for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family. In forming a marital union, two people become something greater than once they were. As some of the petitioners in these cases demonstrate, marriage embodies a love that may endure even past death. It would misunderstand these men and women to say they disrespect the idea of marriage. Their plea is that they do respect it, respect it so deeply that they seek to find its fulfillment for themselves. Their hope is not to be condemned to live in loneliness, excluded from one of civilization’s oldest institutions. They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law. The Constitution grants them that right.”⁴

Something like this happening in a Protestant country that makes a great profession of believing in the Bible seems unbelievable. American Presidents, when they take the oath of office, do so with their hand on the Bible, meaning that they accept its principles as the highest, as unconditional. However, what has now occurred shows that the Holy Scriptures are no longer the foundation of this country. Unfortunately we find the same trend in the northern countries of Europe, where marriage between people of the same sex is not only accepted but also legalized. In the past, those countries held high the banner of the holy Bible; but now they ignore it and defend or adopt attitudes that are directly contrary to it.

Biblical assessment

The teachings of the Holy Scriptures on homosexuality are not confusing or difficult to understand. Everyone can read and understand them without needing any long explanation. The first reference on this subject is found in the sad story of the wealthy cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. These names are well known in history as exhibiting the deplorable characteristics

of homosexuality. The testimony of the Holy Scriptures is irrefutable: “... The men of Sodom were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.” “... The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and ... their sin is very grievous.” Genesis 13:13; 18:20.

We get an idea of their moral state when we read how they wished to treat the two “men” who had arrived in the city. “... Before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.” Genesis 19:4, 5.

Judgment from heaven fell on the people of Sodom that very night. “And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly. And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked.” 2 Peter 2:6, 7.

“Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” Jude 7.

Additional Bible statements

The same sins of heathen society were recorded centuries later, in the time of the New Testament. Writing to the Roman believers, the apostle Paul, feeling great pain in his heart because of the great immorality, stated: “And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman,

What has now occurred shows that the Holy Scriptures are no longer the foundation of this country.



burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet." Romans 1:23-27.

This message is too clear to be misunderstood. "... Women did change the natural use into that which is against nature." "Men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men." God's plan of creation and His word show what is of God and what is not. Transgression of the divine law of purity will have natural consequences.

The message of the Holy Scriptures is not just for the times of Sodom and Gomorrah and the New Testament. The message also reaches to our days. What do the prophecies reveal about our time? What conditions will prevail again? Despite the warning and judgment that fell upon those cities, licentious practices will rise and prevail again. Jesus Himself prophesied concerning the end of time: "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot;... Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed." Luke 17:28, 30.

Looking to the future, when sin will be separated from righteousness and be punished, the Scriptures say: "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.

And the Spirit of prophecy refers to "the indulgence of perverted appetite" and its consequences, as follows: "There is a close relation between the moral law and the laws that God had established in the physical world. If men would be obedient to the law of God, carrying out in their lives the principles of its ten precepts, the principles of righteousness that it teaches would be a safeguard against wrong habits. But as through the indulgence of perverted appetite they have declined in virtue, so they have become weakened through their own immoral practices and their violation of physical laws."⁵

When we consider the laws judges and governors are enacting in different countries and

compare them with God's holy word, we are greatly perplexed and grieved. How is it possible for people to go so far in ruining themselves and others? Even though they know that God's word warns them against such degrading practices, they authorize and even legalize them!

Facing conflict

Serious questions now arise in the minds of believers, for they see that, directly or indirectly, these laws may be used against God's people. What are we to do when human enactments are openly contrary to the holy word, as in this case? What should we do if we are required to submit to and comply with unrighteous laws? What would we do if one or some of our ministers in the United States or some other country of Europe would be required to perform such unbiblical marriages? What will happen if a government, with the current way of thinking, requires our church and members to accept homosexuals, while they continue to openly practice such impurity, as members in the church? What would we do? Are we to obey human laws, or recognize and respect God's holy principles? What would be the solution?

This problem is not new. Conflicts between men's statutes and God's law have arisen many times and in various ways over the centuries. In apostolic times, the issue was the preaching of Jesus—His resurrection and the gospel. The apostles and believers proclaimed the message of salvation everywhere, beginning in Jerusalem. The Jewish authorities hated this preaching and commanded the Christians not to preach in the name of Jesus. Whom were the believers in Christ to obey—the Lord, who had said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matthew 28:19), or the Jewish authorities, who commanded Christians to stop preaching the gospel in the name of Jesus?

Concerning this issue, we have two cases. In the first one, the apostles were simply speaking in the temple. "And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and

Conflicts between men's statutes and God's law have arisen many times and in various ways over the centuries.

preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.” Acts 4:1-3.

After counseling among themselves, the authorities summoned the apostles to appear before their council. “And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” Acts 4:7. The apostle Peter gave a very good testimony (Acts 4:8-11), but the Jewish authorities persisted in trying to silence their Christian preaching. The authorities said: “... Let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” Acts 4:17, 18. This was a very critical moment. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, “Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” Acts 4:19. The faithful brethren continued to preach.

It did not end there. In the second case, the apostles were put into prison again for the same reason. An angel of the Lord opened the door of the prison, freeing them to go and preach. Acts 5:18, 19. At this point, the apostles were again called before the council, and the high priest asked them: “Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man’s blood upon us.” Acts 5:28. Were the apostles intimidated or convinced to stop carrying out their divine mission? No! “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29); they did not surrender to the orders of the Jewish authorities but continued preaching.

Commenting on these experiences, the Spirit of prophecy gives precious counsel: “The principle for which the disciples stood so fearlessly when, in answer to the command not to speak any more in the name of Jesus, they declared, ‘Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye,’ is the same that the adherents of the gospel struggled to maintain in the days of the Reformation....

“This principle we in our day are firmly to maintain. The banner of truth and religious liberty held aloft by the founders of the gospel church and by God’s witnesses during the centuries that have passed since then, has, in this last conflict, been committed to our hands. The responsibility for this great gift rests with those whom God has blessed with a knowledge of His word. We are to receive this word as supreme authority. We are to recognize human government as an ordinance of divine appointment, and teach obedience to it as a sacred duty, within its legitimate sphere. But when its claims conflict with the claims of God, we must obey God rather than men. God’s word must be recognized as above all human legislation. A ‘Thus saith the Lord’ is not to be set aside for a ‘Thus saith the church’ or a ‘Thus saith the state.’ The crown of Christ is to be lifted above the diadems of earthly potentates.

“We are not required to defy authorities. Our words, whether spoken or written, should be carefully considered, lest we place ourselves on record as uttering that which would make us appear antagonistic to law and order. We are not to say or do anything that would unnecessarily close up our way. We are to go forward in Christ’s name, advocating the truths committed to us. If we are forbidden by men to do this work, then we may say, as did the apostles, ‘Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.’”⁵

May the Lord bless our dear brethren in the United States, as well in Europe and wherever a similar test may come, not to give in to fear and make compromises but, with God’s help, to remain faithful until we, with our brethren of past ages, receive the crown of victory and eternal life. **SW**

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¹ <http://www.biography.com/people/anthony-kenedy-9362868#lawyer-and-judge>.

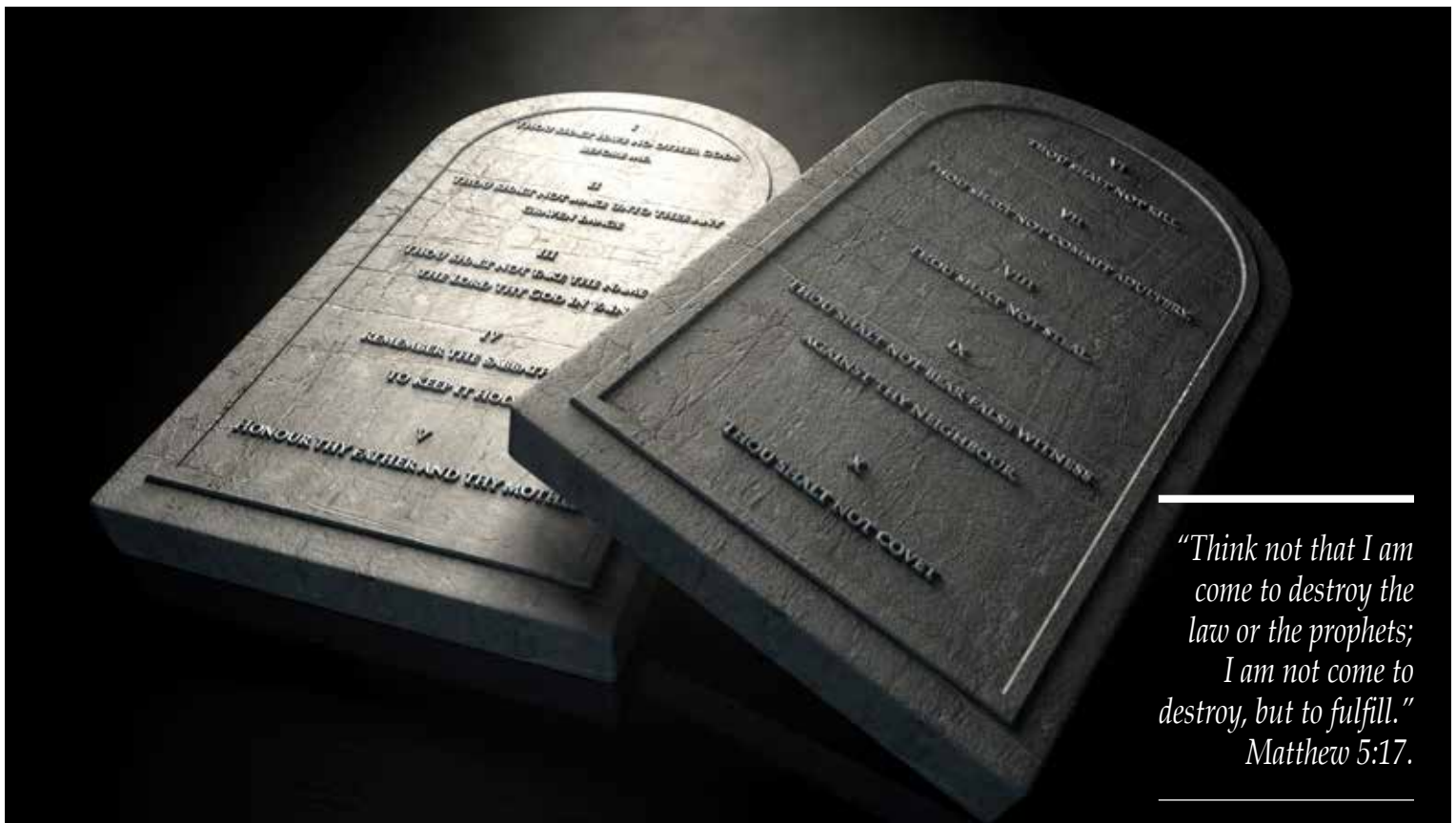
² Ibid.

³ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2015/06/26/10-key-lines-from-the-supreme-court-decision-and-dissent-and-why-they-mattered>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 567.

⁶ *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 68, 69.



*"Think not that I am
come to destroy the
law or the prophets;
I am not come to
destroy, but to fulfill."
Matthew 5:17.*

The Exalted Position of the Law of God

By Ellen G. White

*Review and Herald,
September 27, 1881*

What a contrast between the words of the Divine Teacher, and the language of those who claim that Christ came to abrogate the Father's law, and to do away with the Old Testament! Our Saviour, who knew all things, understood the wiles of Satan, the snares by which he would seek to entrap the children of men, and hence made this positive statement to meet the questioning doubts and the blind unbelief of all coming time.

The ceremonial law, given by God through Moses, with its sacrifices and ordinances, was to be binding upon the Hebrews until type met antitype in the death of Christ as the Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world. Then all the sacrificial offerings and services were to be abolished. Paul and the other apostles labored to show this, and resolutely withstood those Judaizing teachers who declared that Christians should observe the ceremonial law.

The law of ten precepts, spoken from Mount Sinai, Christ Himself declares that He came not to destroy. This testimony should forever settle the question. The law of God is as immutable as the throne of Jehovah. It will maintain its claims upon all mankind in all ages, unchanged by time or place or circumstances. The ritual system was of an altogether different character, added to guard the ten precepts of the Eternal.

Christ declares, that He came not to destroy the law, but to fulfill—"to magnify the law and make it honorable," as Isaiah, hundreds of years before, had prophesied would be the Messiah's work.

"To fulfill the law." By His own life He gives the children of men an example of perfect obedience to that law. In the sermon on the mount He made clear and distinct its every precept, in order to sweep away the rubbish of erroneous tradition, with which the Jews had encumbered its sacred statutes, to illustrate and enforce its principles, and to show in all its particulars the length and breadth and height and depth of the righteousness required by the law of God.

The Pharisees were dissatisfied with the teachings of Christ. The practical godliness which He enjoined condemned them. They desired Him to dwell upon the external observances of the ceremonial law, and the customs and traditions of the fathers. But Jesus teaches the spiritual nature of the law and its far-reaching claims. Love to God and to men must dwell in the heart and control the life—the spring of every thought and every action.

Christ declares, "Verily I say unto you"—making the assertion as emphatic as possible—"Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled." Matthew 5:18. Here Christ teaches, not merely what had been and were then the claims of God's law upon mankind, but what shall be its claims so long as the heavens and the earth remain.

There is perfect harmony between the law of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. "I and My Father are one," says the Great Teacher. The gospel of Christ is the good news of grace, or favor, by which man may be released from the condemnation of sin, and enabled to render obedience to the law of God. The gospel points to the moral code as a rule of life. That law, by its demands for undeviating obedience, is continually pointing the sinner to the gospel for pardon and peace.

Says the great apostle, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid. Yea, we establish the law." And again he declares that "the law is holy, and the commandment

holy, and just, and good." Romans 3:31; 7:12. Enjoining supreme love to God, and equal love to our fellowmen, it is indispensable alike to the glory of God and to human happiness.

After the fall, it had been impossible for man with his sinful nature to render obedience to the law of God, had not Christ, by the offer of His own life, purchased the right to lift up the race where they could once more work in harmony with its requirements.

There are persons professing to be ministers of Christ, who declare with the utmost assurance that no man ever did or ever can keep the law of God. But, according to the Scriptures, Christ "took upon Himself our nature;" He "was made in fashion as a man." He was man's example, man's representative, and He declares of Himself, "I have kept My Father's commandments." John 15:10. The beloved disciple urges that every follower of Christ "ought himself also so to walk even as He walked." 1 John 2:6. All who are Christ's will follow the example of Christ. All who justify the sinner in his transgression of God's law, belong to that class of whom our Saviour said, "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:19. They can have no part with Him who came to magnify the law and make it honorable. They are deceiving the people with their sophistry—saying to the sinner, "It shall be well with thee," when God has declared that "the soul that sinneth [transgresseth the law] it shall die." Ezekiel 18:20.

Christ's words are both explicit and comprehensive. "Whosoever"—minister or layman, wise or ignorant—"shall break one of these least commandments"—willfully or presumptuously, as did Adam and Eve—is included in the condemnation. Breaking one of the commandments makes man a commandment-breaker.

"Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." James 2:10. No excuse can avail for him who strictly obeys nine of the precepts of God's law, but ventures to break one because it is for his profit or convenience to do so. God demands implicit obedience to all His requirements.

There is perfect harmony between the law of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ.



When this law is practically carried out in everyday life, it is found indeed to be the wisdom of God.

“And shall teach men so.” This is a point worthy of careful consideration. Christ foresaw that men would not only break the commandments of God themselves, but would in a special sense teach others to break them. Every Sabbath-breaker is by his example teaching others to transgress. But some are not content with this. They defend the sin of breaking the fourth commandment, and pervert the word of God to justify the transgressor. Such persons shall be of no esteem in the reign of heaven—shall have no part there. But the greatest guilt rests upon the professed watchmen, and they will receive the severest punishment. They are in the highest sense enemies of Christ, as they put on, over corrupt hearts, the livery of heaven to serve the devil in. They do not hesitate to speak evil of the law, and even make those who do not study the Bible for themselves believe that the curse of God is upon them if they keep it. All we have to do, say they, is to believe in Christ—come to Christ. The most fatal delusion of the Christian world in this generation is that in pouring contempt on the law of God they think they are exalting Christ. What a position! In so doing, they array Christ against Christ. It was Christ who spoke the law from Sinai. It was Christ who gave the law to Moses, engraven on tables of stone. It was His Father’s law; and Christ says, “I and My Father are one.” The Pharisees held the reverse of the modern position, but were in just as great an error. They rejected Christ, but exalted the law. And it makes little difference which position we take, so long as we ignore the true one—that faith in Christ must be accompanied by obedience to the law of God.

Now, while we point the sinner to Jesus Christ as the One who can take away sin, we must explain to him what sin is, and show him the necessity of being saved *from* his sins, not *in* them. He must be made to feel that he must cease to transgress the law of God, which is to cease to sin. Paul makes the inquiry many years after the death of Christ, “Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet.” Romans 7:7. Thus saying, Paul exalts the moral law. When this law is practically carried out in everyday life, it is found indeed

to be the wisdom of God. It serves to detect sin. It discovers the defects in the moral character, and in the light of the law sin becomes exceedingly sinful, revealing its true character in all its hideousness.

The law of God given from Sinai is a copy of the mind and will of the Infinite God. It is sacredly revered by the holy angels. Obedience to its requirements will perfect Christian character, and restore man, through Christ, to his condition before the fall.

The sins forbidden in the law could never find place in heaven. It was the love of God to man that prompted Him to express His will in the ten precepts of the decalogue. And when, through sin, man’s understanding became darkened, God came down upon Mount Sinai and spoke His law with an audible voice, and wrote it on tables of stone. Afterward He showed His love for man by sending prophets and teachers to declare His law.

God has given man a complete rule of life in His law. Obeyed, he shall live by it, through the merits of Christ. Transgressed, it has power to condemn. The law sends men to Christ, and Christ points them back to the law. **SW**



“Let those who are as stars in the hand of Christ remember that they are ever to preserve a sacred, holy dignity. They are Christ’s representatives. Simplicity in Christ is the pure, sacred dignity of the truth.”
—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 414.

Epaphroditus

God's Gambler

By Larry Watts

God has given us the privilege of living in these last days. We stand on the shoulders of those many God-fearing men who have gone before us. One of those was a man named Epaphroditus.

This man lived in Philippi and, along with the other members of the church there, was concerned about the apostle Paul, who was in prison in Rome. They had heard that the man of God had lost the privilege of living and working in his own house, perhaps because his trial date had been set and he was now more strictly confined, with no way to support himself. The Philippian church decided to send him help. But who should take it? How it was decided is not revealed, but the man appointed for the task was Epaphroditus.

Of course, at the same time, Paul was concerned about the Philippian church and all the other churches he had established in different places. "Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches," he wrote in 2 Corinthians 11:28, *New International Version*. "I thank my God upon every remembrance for you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel...." Philippians 1:3-6.

The Macedonian call

Looking back to Paul's experience in Philippi, it can be seen that on his second missionary journey he ended up in Troas, where in vision he saw

"a man of Macedonia ... saying come over ... and help us." And "immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them." Acts 16:9, 10.

Luke, the writer of Acts, indicated with the pronoun "we" that he was a firsthand reporter of the subsequent events recorded in the book. Timothy was also with Paul and Silas, having joined them in Derbe, Timothy's hometown. Luke's presence increased the evangelistic team to four members as they set sail for Neapolis under the divine direction of the Macedonian call and walked the remaining eight miles inland to Philippi.

Apparently Philippi was not such a large and prosperous town that it attracted many Jews. There was no synagogue to visit on the





Sabbath, as was Paul's usual custom, so they all went to the "river side, where prayer was wont to be made...." There they found, not the man of Paul's vision, but "a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, [who] heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And ... she was baptized, and her household...." Acts 16:13-15. That was the beginning of the church in Philippi.

Suffering for Christ's sake

Some days or weeks later, the messages of the gospel brought by the group of four caused such a stir in the city that the authorities arrested Paul and Silas and had them beaten and locked up for a night in stocks in the town prison. That blessed night, the Philippian jailer and his house were converted and baptized through the joyful witness of Paul and Silas as well as the miraculous earthquake. Thus the church in Philippi had a very dramatic beginning and continued to have a very special place in Paul's heart; and he, in their hearts. It was here that he made some very close friends.

Philippians is a book of joy. Years later, when Paul was alone in prison, it was a joy for him to remember the Philippians. Now they remembered him and wanted to help him. At the end of this letter, he stated "that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia" (today's Bulgaria) and went on to Greece, "no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only." Philippians 4:15. They did it again! Love found a way!

We read in Acts that the Bereans "were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily...." Acts 17:11. It was from Philippi that Paul traveled 100 miles to Thessaloniki and then another 45 miles to Berea. From there he later went 318 miles further to Athens (probably by ship). After a short stay in Athens, he spent a year and a half in Corinth. It was because circumstances made him unwelcome in Philippi that he ended up going on to Greece.

Bonded through trial

The miracles and power of God revealed in Philippi brought about a church that really loved Paul. It was apparently one of his favorites; and over time, of all the churches, the Philippians offered him the most help. Now they again wanted to send him a love offering in his hour of need. They appointed one of their own to carry the gifts and messages. Paul expressed his gratitude for their gifts with these words: "I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God." Philippians 4:18.

How and why Epaphroditus was chosen as their courier is not known, but from the book of Philippians (Paul's written thanks for their alms and message) we understand a few things about the situation in the church family in Philippi as well as the character of the man they sent. Besides delivering the gifts and the message, Epaphroditus must have also shared his own concern for the situation back home. It seems that "some [there] indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and ... of contention, not sincerely,... But the other of love...." 1:15-17. He wrote about this: "What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached;... I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." V. 1:18. In the end, he again counseled them to "Be careful for nothing [*don't worry yourself about others' motives*]; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." 4:6.

Three qualities

As for the messenger, Paul described him in very appreciative terms! "Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants." 2:25. Paul told them that there were three things that this brother had been to the apostle.

First, his **brother**—they shared the goal of eternal life. The term here for brother, *adelphos*, includes camaraderie, friendship, affection, and strong feelings of attachment. Paul was saying in other

The church in Philippi had a very dramatic beginning and continued to have a very special place in Paul's heart.

words, He is my brother because he is IN CHRIST and Christ is IN HIM. Therefore, when he returns, treat him as you would treat me if I were in your midst, because he is my emissary to you!

Second, he was more than a brother; he was a *fellow laborer*. It is one thing to call someone your brother or sister, but it is quite another to lose sight of self to work together synergistically for a greater cause. And this is what Epaphroditus did. He, like Paul, labored, “not regarding his [own] life”—to the point of being “nigh unto death.” 2:27, 30. There is much more than brotherhood here; there is trust. The emphasis is not on a common life, but on common effort. He was not just a brother in spiritual life and love but also a worker together for Christ.

Third, Epaphroditus was not simply a fellow laborer; he was a *soldier*, someone who was willing to fight for the truth and not turn back when the battle gets intense! He was willing to give his life for the cause of truth, and he did exactly that. He was so concerned for the church in Philippi that he became ill. It was much more than homesickness. He struggled to know how to deal with those who were always negative. No matter what one did, someone else always complained that the church was not doing enough; or when an idea was expressed, they would say, “No, that’s no good.” Rarely did they give a helping hand or even an idea of how to improve things. And others were perhaps working against the leadership, trying to put themselves first. So Paul said to him, to the church, and to us, “Don’t worry about that!” Just do what is right and be willing to serve as Christ served. Whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and worthy of praise, “think on these things.” 4:8.

The title “fellow soldier” is found outside the Bible as a title of honor usually reserved for a common soldier who is very special. From the Greek word for that (*sustratiotes*) we get the word “strategist,” or great leader. Paul used it to describe this common man who demonstrated uncommon traits of courage and leadership.

My brother—relationship through Christ.

Fellow laborer—working together for those who are still in the world and for whom Christ died.

Fellow soldier—standing together with Paul before the enemies of Christ.

A worthy example

Before bringing Epaphroditus into the picture, Paul pointed to Christ. He who thought it not robbery to be equal with God humbled Himself even unto the death of the cross, and therefore God exalted Him above all. After pointing to Christ, Paul referred to this man who was the Philippians’ gift to the apostle, for he wanted to send Epaphroditus back as Paul’s own thank offering to the church in Philippi.

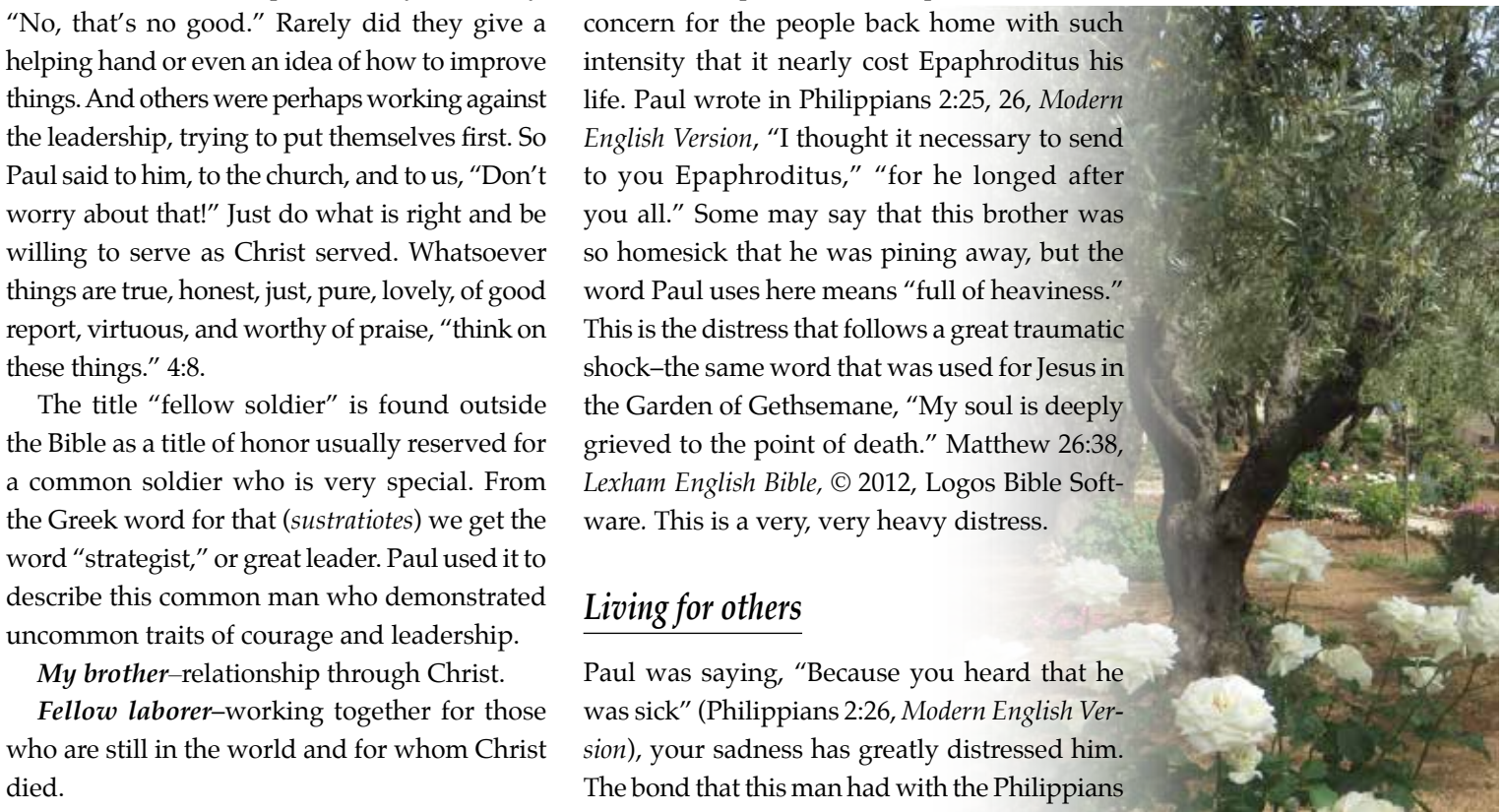
Epaphroditus was not an apostle or evangelist, nor was he a preacher or teacher, as far as we can tell, although he may have taught, preached, and participated in evangelism. He was just a common man. But this common man extended himself and allowed God to use him to do uncommon things. And God could do that because he had a heart for others. God gave Epaphroditus a very special mission—to minister to the greatest living minister of his time.

Arriving in Rome, Epaphroditus shared the love of the Philippian believers as well as his own love for Paul. In addition, this messenger must have expressed to the apostle a love and concern for the people back home with such intensity that it nearly cost Epaphroditus his life. Paul wrote in Philippians 2:25, 26, *Modern English Version*, “I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus,” “for he longed after you all.” Some may say that this brother was so homesick that he was pining away, but the word Paul uses here means “full of heaviness.” This is the distress that follows a great traumatic shock—the same word that was used for Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death.” Matthew 26:38, *Lexham English Bible*, © 2012, Logos Bible Software. This is a very, very heavy distress.

Living for others

Paul was saying, “Because you heard that he was sick” (Philippians 2:26, *Modern English Version*), your sadness has greatly distressed him. The bond that this man had with the Philippians

He was willing to give his life for the cause of truth, and he did exactly that.



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was so deep that he was totally stressed over their sadness about his sickness, and Paul said he had to send Epaphroditus back so they would know he was all right. It appears that everyone was much more concerned about others than they were about possessions. The Philippians were concerned about Paul and then about Epaphroditus. The latter was concerned about them, and Paul was concerned about him and them.

It is truly wonderful to see people in the ministry who are compelled by relationships more than by programs! While there is a place for those, the higher mission is to meet the real needs of real people! And Epaphroditus needed to go home for his own and his home church's sakes.

Paul explained that Epaphroditus wasn't upset because of his brush with death, not at all. He was upset because his fellow believers were upset. So, he needed to go home to put everyone's mind at ease. "God had mercy on him" and delivered him. "And not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." V. 27. If Epaphroditus had died, Paul would have had wave after wave of grief!

God made a sovereign decision and spared the life of Epaphroditus, having mercy on him and also on Paul, who would have been grief-stricken if that man had lost his life while he was with Paul in Rome.

Therefore, Paul wrote, "Receive him in the Lord with all joy and hold men like him in high regard," "because he came close to death," "risking his life," like a real soldier in the work of Christ. Vv. 29, 30, *New American Standard Bible*.

The gamblers

The Greek word for "risking his life" is *periballa*, meaning "to roll the dice"—to gamble, to willingly expose oneself to danger. Epaphroditus loved the cause of Christ, and he loved the Philippians so much—he loved not himself—that he literally gave his life away.

In the years after the New Testament era, there was an association of Christian men and women who took the name "The Parabalani"—"The Gamblers." Their hero was Epaphroditus, and it was their mission to visit prisoners and the sick, and especially those with infec-

tious, dangerous, and communicable diseases. The Parabalani went where others feared to go and unhesitatingly and boldly proclaimed the Lord Jesus Christ everywhere without any thought of their own safety.

In A.D. 252, the city of Carthage was suffering from the plague. The bodies of the dead were everywhere, and no one wanted to touch or bury them. Therefore, the Christian bishop of the city, Cyprian, called the believers to an assembly at which they joined together in self-forgetfulness and went throughout the city and buried the dead. Historians tell us that they also ministered to the sick, coming close to them in that plague-infested city, risking their lives to save some, if possible. Truly, they loved not their lives unto the death.

But there is more to the name "Epaphroditus." It means "the favorite of Aphrodite," the goddess of luck and beauty. When the Greeks rolled the dice, the word they used was "Epaphroditus," meaning "Good luck." In other words, they wanted favor from Aphrodite. Paul did a little play with words when he said of Epaphroditus that "he risked his life."

At the foot of the cross of Jesus, it is quite possible that, when the soldiers cast lots for His garments, they exclaimed, "Epaphroditus!" As they gambled for Christ's last earthly possessions, they could have known that the Son of God was there giving His life for their souls. The very dying form of the One who suffered there for man is God's "gamble," cast into the earth for all to see. However, it was not a "gamble" of chance on God's part, but of choice. Of free will, Jesus cast Himself over the wall of heaven for us. He paid the price so He could freely invite all to come and drink of the water of life, longing for every soul to make the choice to be saved by Him. He took the "gamble" that you would say, "Yes!"

The church of Philippi was not rich in earthly wealth, but the believers were rich in love. They gave what they had and were blessed. In return, they received back their loving brother with one of the most inspiring messages in all of Scripture. "He that watereth shall be watered also himself." Proverbs 11:25. Out of love, that church, like Joseph, became "a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall" of time, even to this day. Genesis 49:22. **SW**



Group in Benin after the baptism of four souls.



A conference was held in Lubumbashi, Congo, in February. Pastor Sevith Moyo and his family moved to Congo to assist with the work in the large, French-speaking country, where the work is advancing for God's glory.



Three young people were baptized in Panama in February.



Greetings come from the believers in Cuba.



In March, two souls were baptized in Japan during the Field Conference.

News to inspire



Believers on Sabbath in February in South Sudan.

Baptism in Curaçao

The church in Curaçao will soon be privileged to have a new minister to support the work. We would like to share the report that our minister sent to the General Conference after his recent visit to this Caribbean island: "I greet you with John 15:11: 'These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.'"

"By the grace of God, we started our meeting on Friday evening with a public lecture given by the elder of the local church. On Sabbath, we enjoyed wonderful teachings and classes led by the president of the Field.

"Very early on Sunday morning, we left for the baptismal site (this was the first time that I conducted such events so early, but it was very inspiring for me).

At 6:30 a.m., we started the ceremony with a good number of participants, including several souls who wish to make their covenant with the Lord. On Sunday afternoon, we celebrated the Lord's Supper, with 37 brethren participating in the public meeting and five in their homes because of health limitations.

"We hope that this information may be of encouragement to

our dear readers. We pray for God's church everywhere."

Baptism and outreach in China

"So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." 1 Thessalonians 2:8.



Health fair in China.



Believers in Curaçao.

On April 1-8, 2015, Dr. Roland De La Paz, Medical Missionary Leader of the General Conference, had an opportunity to visit China again. In addition to conducting a seminar on dress reform (hair dyes and perms, jewelry, cosmetics), organization, Bible ethics, and church management, he held a Health Fair. Sabbath was a day of fasting. In the afternoon, one soul was baptized and accepted into the church. The temperature was low, 2 degrees Celsius, but still the baptism proceeded with the help of God.

The meeting in China was a wonderful success. The brethren are growing in faith, and the work is progressing. May God continue to bless His cause around the world.

Joyful experience in Samoa

The Oceania Union (www.imspacific.org) shared the following report in their Newsletter of June 18, 2015:

"Greetings to all from Joshua 22:3: 'You have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your God.'

"God has been amazing in all that He has done among His people in the Pacific, especially

"One of the greatest blessings was witnessing one sister who decided to give her life to Jesus through baptism. Sister Seira touched everyone's heart and made Heaven joyful when she was baptized on Sunday and became one of our church members in Apia. May Jesus continue to lead and guide her life so she can be a blessing and encouragement to her husband and children.

"May we all pray and exalt Jesus for all He has done for His children all around the world, especially the Pacific. These



Ten souls were baptized in Manarintsoa, Madagascar.



The group in Vatele-Fou, Samoa, with Pastor Anton Salavyov.

His flock at the Vaitele-Fou church on the island of Samoa. It was great to visit all of them on the weekend, when we got together to open the Sabbath on Friday evening and then worshipped with the whole group on Sabbath. The youth group there was a wonderful blessing. The Lord's presence was felt by all, and everyone was blessed with spiritual messages preached and shared by Pastor Anton Salavyov.

"Although some members had come from afar, God Himself prepared the way for all of us to be together and be filled with His Spirit on this special weekend.

dear souls need a lot of prayers, for Satan is running around like a roaring lion to devour God's children who love and obey Him. God bless all His flock in Samoa!

"The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?' Psalm 27:1."

Missionary visit to French Guyana

By the grace of God, a missionary visit to French Guyana took place from January 20 to March 5, 2015. Our missionary, Brother Luis Fernandez, from Venezuela,

worked in the city of Saint Laurent, where he was able to contact people of different denominations and nationalities. Two public lectures and two cooking

classes were conducted, along with missionary visits, Bible studies, and health lectures. Now a good number of souls desire to continue studying God's word.

Madagascar news

Pastor Elijah Zwane traveled to Madagascar with his wife from December 31, 2014, to January 20, 2015, for an introductory visit, accompanied by Pastor Parmenas Shirima. After returning to his country, Brother Zwane started working on his papers to move to Madagascar with his family. That process has now been completed. In the beginning of September, Brother Zwane and his family will move to Madagascar.



Health lectures were held in March in French Guyana.



A sister baptized recently in Namibia receives the certificate confirming her entrance into God's church.

Gifts from Heaven

“**E**very member of the church of Christ will be tested and proved. To each one sacred responsibilities are committed; for each one is to be connected with Christ, and to labor earnestly and cheerfully as a free moral agent, becoming more and more intelligent in working as a laborer ‘together with God.’ By practice he must learn how to pray, putting his whole soul into his petitions. Through self-denial he must learn how to present gifts and offerings willingly unto God. He must not consume in selfish indulgence everything which he gains, and present nothing to God in acknowledgment of the fact that he is constantly the recipient of Heaven’s gifts. The Christian will be constantly imparting that which is bestowed upon him. True religion is imitation of Christ. Not one of Christ’s true followers will practice selfish indulgence in any way when the cause of God is languishing because of the poverty of the people. God means that someone shall supply that which is wanting for the needs of the poorer brethren, and for the necessities of His cause. The kingdom of heaven must be the first consideration. To follow Christ means continually to study His life of self-denial, and from high motives to practice His good works. To follow means to render obedience. We are under service to God, and we must obey His commands. No soldier is counted a follower of his commander unless he obeys his general’s orders. The Master says, ‘Learn of Me.’ Keep your eye on the model, for Christ gave His life that He might become the teacher of men. Keep yourselves from idols. He desires that everyone who believes in Him should learn how to live His life and practice His virtues.” —*Review and Herald*, August 21, 1894.