

# Old Paths

Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for  
the old paths, where is the good way, and  
walk therein, and ye shall find rest for  
your souls.                      Jeremiah 6:16

The secret of the LORD is with them that  
fear him; and he will shew them his  
covenant.                      Psalm 25:14

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**I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth  
forth trees: (Ecclesiastes 2:6)**





## Corporate Accountability

By Allen Stump

Could you belong to the Masonic Order, known as the Masons, or, if you are a sister, could you belong to the Order of the Eastern Star, an appendant body to the Masons? Why not? Would it be because it is a type of a secret society organization? Maybe you would not agree with the ritual which supposedly says:

*Oh! that my throat had been cut across, my tongue torn out by its roots, and buried in the rough sands of the sea, at low-water mark, where the tide ebbs and flows twice in twenty-four hours.*

Or would your inability to join be because you could not call the head of the lodge *Worshipful Master*?

Could you not belong to the Masonic Order because it is stated at every Masonic funeral that they believe in the immortal soul? The Masonic Order does not lack religion. It has a lot of religion, but it is not the religion of the biblical Christ.

May we take this a step further? Would it be okay to be a non-practicing Mason and at the same time be a faithful Seventh-day Adventist? Should a Mason be required to resign his membership? The same could be asked for a member of the Order of the Eastern Star.

A similar vein of thought might be could you belong to the Society of Jesus, better known as the Jesuits? Would taking an oath to the Pope to defend the Catholic Church bother you? What about the Knights of Columbus? They work for charity and faith. Only practicing Catholic men are eligible, however, so you would not be allowed to be a closet member of the Knights of Columbus and a member of another church.

What is wrong with being a part of the beast, with being a part of Babylon? The answer to this and to all of the previous questions should be clear. Christ cannot accept divided loyalties or a divided allegiance. Jesus said:

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:33)

God did not make us to have divided loyalties. He did not make us to serve him and someone or something else, and it is for this reason that we read:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:14–18)

Instead of yoking up with unbelievers, or with those not of our faith, the Scriptures tell us to separate from them, especially as we draw near the final crisis of this world. Christ makes one last great call:

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. (Revelation 18:4)

So, since you may not be comfortable being a Jesuit or even a Mason, maybe you could quietly leave, not telling anyone you will quit attending further meetings. Would that be okay? Would it give the proper witness? Your name could still be on their record books, but you would not par-

ticipate. It has been rightly said that church membership does not guarantee our entrance to heaven, but could church membership, the wrong church membership, actually be a detriment to or even cause our journey to heaven to fail? Can God approve of believers belonging to organizations that he condemns and that oppose him or his purposes? There is an interesting statement from which we can draw a principle of corporate accountability that is very important. We read:

... the Lord holds **the church** accountable for the sin of its members until they have done all they can to remedy the existing evil. (Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 517.2; all emphasis supplied unless otherwise noted)

Ellen White speaks about *the church* in this statement. What is the church? Paul calls it the body of Christ:

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (1 Corinthians 12:27)

Paul says the gifts of the Spirit are given “for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12).

While Jehovah is a God of mercy, he is also a God of justice. In the time of Noah, he said:

And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man . . . (Genesis 6:3)

There is no record in the Bible where God has or will grant unlimited time for sinners to repent:

With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps account with the nations. While His mercy is tendered, with calls to repentance, this account remains open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath begins. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. Mercy no longer pleads in their behalf. (Ellen White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 364.3)

Our topic is corporate accountability, and we should better define what we are talking about.

The word *corporate* comes from the Latin *corpus*, meaning *body*. To *incorporate* is to make a body composed of few or many members into a single unit. When a corporate body is religious in nature, we call it a church or the church, the body of Christ.

According to inspiration, there is a corporate accountability which individual members of an organized body face versus their individual responsibility. More on this later.

The church, the corpus, is made of the individual members, and one member does not work without the others

being affected. Paul speaks of the body of Christ, comparing it to the human body:

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12)

He goes on to note the intimate relationship each member bears to the body.

That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. (1 Corinthians 12:25–27)

When the little toe hurts, it affects the whole body. Cancer starts from one cell. Then that one cell becomes many, and a whole organ is affected, and, if not cured, the whole body becomes sick, and the person dies.

Jesus declared to Thomas:

I am *the way* [Greek: ἡ ὁδός], the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

The Greek expression for *the way* is ἡ ὁδός (*hē hodos*). This is the Greek definite article<sup>1</sup> with the noun *hodos*, meaning *way, road, path*, etc. We will see more of this combination shortly.

Jesus is the only way, or access, back to the Father and to life. Paul stated this in a manner involving two different corpora:

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15:22)

We are all born into the corpus of Adam, the body of humanity, which only has death. When we find Christ, the way, we find life.

Paul perceived this nature of the *corpus Christi* (the body of Christ), when he wrote to Timothy, stating:

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is *the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*. (1 Timothy 3:14–15)

Paul states that the body of Christ is the pillar and ground of the truth. The Greek word used for *ground* is ἑδραῖωμα (*hedraiōma*), meaning a support, buttress, or foundation.

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1. There are twenty-four versions of the Greek definite article, depending upon case, gender, and number, but all versions carry the same basic meaning.

The *corpus Christi* is to be the pillar, the stay, the visible means through which truth is to be revealed to man, and only as a body adheres to truth can it truly be the church of the living God.

### The apostolic church

It is most informative and very revealing how the apostolic church viewed themselves and how they were viewed by the Jewish church of which they were or had been a part, depending upon their spiritual growth. The most common religious term that we think of today is *Christian*, and we find this first in Acts 11:26:

And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called *Christians* first in Antioch. (Acts 11:26)

When Paul was sharing the gospel with King Agrippa, we read that:

Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a *Christian*. (Acts 26:28)

Of this name, we read:

It was God who gave to them the name of Christian. This is a royal name, given to all who join themselves to Christ. It was of this name that James wrote later, “Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?” James 2:6, 7. And Peter declared, “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.” 1 Peter 4:16, 14. (Ellen White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 157.2)

Interestingly, within the Bible the word *Christian* is only used in Acts 11:26; 26:28; and, as noted above, in 1 Peter 4:16. This was the name that God gave his people, but how did others perceive the early believers? They were known to the Jews as *the way*. Notice carefully the following verses:

And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, 2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of **this way** [Greek: τῆς ὁδοῦ – a form of the definite article with a form of *hodos*], whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1–2)

Though the King James translates τῆς ὁδοῦ as *this way*, it is more accurate to translate it *the way*. Most often this is

translated from the Greek οὗτος (*houtos*), not the definite article ὁ (*ho*) or one of its other forms.

Another place we read about the way is in Acts 19:

And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. 9 But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of **that way** (Greek: τὴν ὁδὸν, a form of the definite article with a form of *hodos*) before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. (Acts 19:8–9)

Here the King James translates it as *that way*, but it is more proper as *the way*. We see the same thing in Acts 19:23:

And the same time there arose no small stir about **that way** [Greek: τῆς ὁδοῦ, a form of the definite article with a form of *hodos*].

This concept of *the way* was again used by Paul as he addressed from the stairs the riotous Jewish mob:

And I persecuted **this way** [Greek: τὴν ὁδὸν, a form of the definite article with a form of *hodos*] unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. (Acts 22:4)

We also see the description used in Acts 24:14, 22, as well.

It is clear from the book of Acts that while the disciples of Christ were first called “Christians” at Antioch, they were known throughout Jewry as simply followers of *the way*.

This concept of *the way of truth which brings life* is very interestingly projected in the New Testament.

Christ presented the devil as a murderer:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:44)

In contrast to the devil, Jesus is “the Prince of life” (Acts 3:15). His mission is one of bringing life and of destroying the one bringing death:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; (Hebrews 2:14)



Because of sin and the death it brings, God sent his only-begotten Son to live and die for us. He is the Word of God incarnate. He is full of grace and truth:

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Through the atoning sacrifice of Calvary, Jesus made it possible for the sons of Adam to become sons of God. John writes:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called **the sons of God**: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. (1 John 3:1)

By default we are the sons of Adam, but through Christ our identification need not remain in the corpus of Adam but, rather, in the corpus of Christ.

This accomplishment of Christ and the provision thus made for man is spoken of as “the way out,” or the “exodus,” by Luke. Like the other synoptic writers, Luke tells the story of the coming of Moses and Elijah to Jesus at the time of the transfiguration. There he states that they spoke of “his decease”:

Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. (Luke 9:31)

This is language that English speakers use at times when someone dies. We call the person “the deceased.” The Greek word translated *decease* in Luke 9:31 is ἔξοδος (*exodos*). It comes from the word ἐκ (*ek*), meaning *out* or *from out*, and from a word we have seen before, ὁδός (*hodos*), meaning *way*. So, Jesus is the way for men and women to be out from this world. Those who proclaimed Jesus as the only way to the Father, as the sole source of salvation (Acts 4:12), were called by the Jewish religious leaders as *followers of the way*.

Paul, in writing to the Hebrew Christians, noted that Jesus has given to us a:

. . . new and living way, [*hodon, a form of hodos*] which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; (Hebrews 10:20)

### Succession

Now we must come to the concept of succession. In the case of the church, or the *corpus Christi*, we have to determine what constitutes succession. There are two very different contenders— organization and truth.

This choice is vividly contrasted in Paul’s arraignment before Felix in the confrontation between him and Tertullus, the lawyer for the hierarchy of Jerusalem.

When permitted to speak in his own defense, Paul declared:

But this I confess unto thee, that after *the way* [Greek: τὴν ὁδόν, a form of the definite article with a form of *hodos*] which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: (Acts 24:14)

What was Paul fundamentally saying in principle? His basic belief had not changed from Judaism! No, it was the same as it always had been—he still accepted the truth of the word of God. He still worshipped the God of his fathers. To Paul, he was simply continuing in the truth which the Lord had revealed—the revelation of the promised Christ.

Because Paul was willing to walk in *the way*, he was viewed with contempt by the Jewish hierarchy.

Tertullus, who was the advocate of the high priest and the leaders, revealed this contempt clearly:

For we have found this man a *pestilent fellow*, and a *mover of sedition* among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: (Acts 24:5)

What made Paul, in the minds of the hierarchy, a *pestilent fellow*, and a *mover of sedition*? Pestilent means *that which is destructive to life*; yet, Paul was preaching about *the Life*! What was his crime? Simply put, he could no longer support the machine and the program it presented to the people.

To Paul, the leadership of Israel had rejected the *Truth*; they had betrayed the trust committed to them. Just as with Stephen before him, Paul believed the leaders had resisted the Holy Spirit to their damnation. Stephen said it well:

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. . . . Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. (Acts 7:51, 53)

What was Paul’s message to those still attached to the succession of the flesh or the organization? While the epistle to the Galatians was no doubt read by some Gentiles, its message was also to former Jews who were still looking to the law to save them. Not the keeping of the law, being physically born into any certain family, or belonging to a certain church could guarantee salvation. Only belief in Christ could.

And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:29)

The inheritance would not come through the flesh of the corporate structure of Israel but by following *the way—truth that leads to life*.

To remain attached to the earthly Jerusalem was not the answer. Paul declared that church controlled by the hierarchy to be in bondage!

For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. 26 But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. (Galatians 4:25–26)

Next month: Biblical examples of corporate accountability.



## Look Here!

Brother Tom Wofford has worked for a few years preparing a book as a response to the book, *The Trinity*, by then Andrews University Professors Whidden, Moon, and Reeve. The title is *Answering The Trinity*. It is an apologetic view about God in favor of the theology of the biblical view of the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers. Brother Tom states it is “a compelling study on the doctrine of God.”

The current manuscript is 278 pages, which includes many notes. Brother Tom has had a challengingly life, but after giving his life to Christ and learning the truth about God, it has been his desire to share the truth and to clarify misconceptions about God.

Brother Tom has written a very thorough manuscript. His current challenge is that he is not a grammarian nor does he have skills in desktop publishing layout (DTP). Tom needs help here. If there is a brother or a sister with the time and willingness to help this project gratuitously, who also has a knowledge of proper grammar and editing skills, and who can do DTP layout, will you please contact us for a copy of the manuscript to examine? (See back page for contact details.) Even if you cannot do DTP layout, just getting the document’s grammar corrected and editing accomplished would be a very big and very welcome help. So, if you enjoy reading truth, have the ability to make it the most presentable as possible, and have the time and willingness to help, please let us know. Thank you!



## New Reference Book on Organization

The lack of gospel order has been perhaps the greatest thing retarding the work of the one true God movement in the last twenty to thirty years. The purpose of organization is to forward the giving of the gospel, and an honest appraisal says that we are not anywhere near where we should be at this point in time. How thankful I am that in the last two years the need for a gospel order and organized work has been realized. I am very thankful for the 1889 HSDA movement and for what it is trying to do.

To help us better understand heaven’s view of orderly working, Pastor Jean-Christophe Bolotte of France has prepared a book on organization, entitled *Fundamental Principles of Church Organization*. This book is composed mostly of Scripture and of Spirit of Prophecy quotations laid out in a systematic and orderly lay. We are in the process of translating this book and will publish it in *Old Paths*, after which we hope to print it as a single book. The Preface and the first part of Chapter 1 are presented below.

*Editor*

### Preface

It is impressive to see the amount of “independent ministries” today, when that phrase does not appear anywhere in the Bible or in the writings of Ellen G. White. Some of them claim to be repairers of breaches, even going so far as to promote the fundamental principles of 1889. They may not be aware that the abandonment of the fundamental principles of 1889 was also the abandonment of the organization as it was in the time of our pioneers:

The enemy of souls has sought to bring in the supposition that a great reformation was to take place among Seventh-day Adventists, and that this reformation would consist in giving up the doctrines which stand as the pillars of our faith, and engaging in a process of reorganization. Were this reformation to take place, what would result? The principles of truth that God in His wisdom has given to the remnant church, would be discarded. Our religion would be changed. The fundamental principles that have sustained the work for the last fifty years would be accounted as error. A new organization would be established . . . (Ellen White, *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 204.2)

Therefore, returning to the old paths not only means returning to the fundamental principles of 1889 but also returning to the organizational structure protecting those principles. Indeed, to refuse God’s organization means to forget the way the Lord led our pioneers:

Let none entertain the thought that we can dispense with organization. It has cost us much study and many prayers for wisdom that we know God has answered, to erect this structure. It has been built up by His direction, through much sacrifice and conflict. (Ellen White, *Christian Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 197.3)

In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history. (Ibid, p. 204.1)

So, those who forget how the Lord led our pioneers to organize themselves should expect nothing good for the future.

This document—which is a simple compilation of the principles of church organization contained in the Bible, amplified in the writings of Sister Ellen G. White, and experienced by her pioneer brethren—is not intended as a church manual. Only inspiration can serve such a function. Thus, like its author, readers seeking to enforce the order will rely on the inspired writings contained in this book rather than on this book itself because, although this document covers many principles, it does not contain all of them with their details relating to organization. It will, therefore, be gradually supplemented each time the need for inspired advice arises.

# Chapter 1: The Need for Organization

## A God of Order

### The organization is not the church

God has a church. It is not the great cathedral, neither is it the national establishment, neither is it the various denominations; it is the people who love God and keep His commandments. “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). Where Christ is even among the humble few, this is Christ’s church, for the presence of the High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity can alone constitute a church. (Ellen White, *The Upward Look*, p. 315.5)

Note: An organization devoid of faithful believers is worthless. This does not mean that the organization in and of itself is bad, as the rest of this document proves.

### Order is the first law of heaven

Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. (Isaiah 40:26)

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. (Psalm 19:1)

Note: God asks his people to give him glory in all things (Revelation 14:6, 7; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31). Now, since the order governing the heavens gives him glory, it follows that the order governing his church also gives him glory.

### The holy angels follow God’s order

Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. (Psalms 103:20)

### Without organization, the holy angels, who are organized, will not work in our favor

Angels work harmoniously. Perfect order characterizes all their movements. The more closely we imitate the harmony and order of the angelic host, the more successful will be the efforts of these heavenly agents in our behalf. If we see no necessity for harmonious action, and are disorderly, undisciplined, and disorganized in our course of action, angels, who are thoroughly organized and move in perfect order, cannot work for us successfully. They turn away in grief, for they are not authorized to bless confusion, distraction, and disorganization. All who desire the co-operation of the heavenly messengers, must work in unison with them. Those who have the unction from on high, will in all their efforts encourage order, discipline, and union of action, and then the angels of God can co-operate with them. But never, never will these heavenly messengers place their endorsement upon irregularity, disorganization, and disorder. All these evils are the result of Satan’s efforts to weaken our forces, to destroy our courage, and prevent successful action. (Ellen G. White, *Christian Experience and Teachings of Ellen G. White*, p. 199.1)

Note: Jesus showed us that we should ask that God’s “will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). Now, since the holy angels act in perfect order, it follows that sincere believers cannot do without perfect order in their actions.

For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (1 Corinthians 14:33)

Let all things be done decently and in order. (1 Corinthians 14:40)



## **Believers must have guidelines for order**

Brethren, never allow anyone's ideas to unsettle your faith in regard to the order and harmony which should exist in the church. Many of you do not see all things clearly. The directions in regard to order in the tabernacle service were recorded that lessons might be drawn from it by all who should live upon the earth. Men were selected to do various parts of the work of setting up and taking down the tabernacle, and if one strayed in carelessly and put his hands to the work assigned to another, he was to be put to death. We serve the same God today. But the death penalty has been abolished; had it not been, there would not now be so much careless, disorderly work in His cause. The God of heaven is a God of order, and He requires all His followers to have rules and regulations, and to preserve order. All should have a perfect understanding of God's work. (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 274.1)

The word of God does not give license for one man to set up his judgment in opposition to the judgment of the church, neither is he allowed to urge his opinions against the opinions of the church. If there were no church discipline and government, the church would go to fragments; it could not hold together as a body. There have ever been individuals of independent minds who have claimed that they were right, that God had especially taught, impressed, and led them. Each has a theory of his own, views peculiar to himself, and each claims that his views are in accordance with the word of God. Each one has a different theory and faith, yet each claims special light from God. These draw away from the body, and each one is a separate church of himself. All these cannot be right, yet they all claim to be led of the Lord. The word of Inspiration is not Yea and Nay, but Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus. (Ellen G. White, *Testimony Treasures*, vol. 1, p. 390.2)

## **Christ wants his followers to be gathered into an organized and disciplined church**

The church of Christ is in constant peril. Satan is seeking to destroy the people of God, and one man's mind, one man's judgment, is not sufficient to be trusted. Christ would have His followers brought together in church capacity, observing order, having rules and discipline, and all subject one to another, esteeming others better than themselves. Union and confidence are essential to the prosperity of the church. If each member of the church feels at liberty to move independently of the others, taking his own peculiar course, how can the church be in any safety in the hour of danger and peril? The prosperity and very existence of a church depend upon the prompt, united action and mutual confidence of its members. (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 445.2)

## **Organization will be necessary until the end of the time**

Before leaving Australia, and since coming to this country, I have been instructed that there is a great work to be done in America. Those who were in the work at the beginning are passing away. Only a few of the pioneers of the cause now remain among us. Many of the heavy burdens formerly borne by men of long experience, are now falling upon younger men.

This transfer of responsibilities to laborers whose experience is more or less limited, is attended with some dangers against which we need to guard. The world is filled with strife for the supremacy. The spirit of pulling away from fellow-laborers, the spirit of disorganization, is in the very air we breathe. By some, all efforts to establish order are regarded as dangerous,—as a restriction of personal liberty, and hence to be feared as popery. These deceived souls regard it a virtue to boast of their freedom to think and act independently. They declare that they will not take any man's say-so; that they are amenable to no man. I have been instructed that it is Satan's special effort to lead men to feel that God is pleased to have them choose their own course, independent of the counsel of their brethren.

Herein lies a grave danger to the prosperity of our work. We must move discreetly, sensibly, in harmony with the judgment of God-fearing counselors; for in this course alone lies our safety and strength. Otherwise God cannot work with us and by us and for us.

O how Satan would rejoice if he could succeed in his efforts to get in among this people, and disorganize the work at a time when thorough organization is essential, and will be the greatest power to keep out spurious uprisings, and to refute claims not endorsed by the word of God! We want to hold the lines evenly, that there shall be no breaking down of the system of organization and order that has been built up by wise, careful labor. License must not be given to disorderly elements that desire to control the work at this time.

Some have advanced the thought that as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man's being independent. The stars of heaven are all under law, each influencing the other to do the will of God, yielding their common obedience to the law that controls their action. And, in order that the Lord's work may advance healthfully and solidly, His people must draw together.

*Continued on page 9, column 2*



# 2023 Fall Creek Falls Camp Meeting Review

The following was prepared by some of the attendees at the camp meeting we had at Fall Creek Falls State Park in May. We would appreciate others who attended the camp to make comments or suggestions for next year. Please let us know if you agree or disagree with any of the evaluations below and give any further comments that would be helpful to others. Also, if you did not attend but would be interested in attending a camp meeting in your area, please share that feedback as well. You can write to the editor at the address on the back page either by postal mail or e-mail. Thank you so much for being willing to help us make the next camp better.

## Things that worked well

1. Feeding and housing the people was a huge blessing to many and kept the people together and able to fellowship during meal times. It allowed those with financial struggles to attend.
2. Pre-made food entrees and great kitchen staff/helpers
3. Overall, the meetings were on time, and the speakers were very good. The meetings were well attended.
4. Communion was a big blessing.
5. The campground, surrounded by nature and with hiking trails and waterfalls, was a lovely location.

## What were the challenges?

1. Some of the kitchen ovens and burners did not work.
2. Facility overall was not large enough. (Optimal would be a kitchen/dining area separate from the meeting area.)
3. Vehicles driving by during meetings.
4. Noise of the ice machine and the kitchen refrigerators and freezers made it hard for those in the back rows to hear the speaker.
5. Not sufficient bathroom facilities in the kitchen/meeting area.
6. People not properly notified to bring their own bedding.
7. Lack of air conditioning may be an issue in that facility during hotter months.

## Suggestions for next camp meeting

1. Make sure kitchen ovens and burners work prior to renting
2. Seek a larger facility

3. A simple sound system with one microphone for those attending onsite. (Possibly an area mic, like a choir mic, could be placed near the speaker podium, and a mic would not need to be passed from person to person. Could the small mic for the online viewers be an area mic also and not need to be passed from person to person?)
4. Prepare recipe handouts which include all recipes used for camp meeting food. [They are beginning to be published this month. See page 15.]
5. Include at least one cooking class that would occur just before the noon meal so that participants can try the food demonstrated.
6. Have an evangelism training class for lay people, to include how to give a Bible study, possibly with a live Bible study example.
7. Better scheduling for children and youth classes.
8. Leave the Friday afternoon schedule open and offer coordinated hikes and activities people can join if they wish.
9. Avoid changing the meeting schedule during camp meeting, if at all possible.
10. Choose a kitchen committee early, use the menu template from this camp meeting with a few revisions, and have pre-made food entrees, as at this camp meeting
11. Be sure to advertise clearer camp directions (with GSP coordinates) and the need to bring bedding. A list of recommendations could be included in the advertisement, i.e. bedding for twin-sized beds, hiking shoes, mosquito spray, etc.



“New Book . . .” continued from page 8

The spasmodic, fitful movements of some who claim to be Christians are well represented by the work of strong but untrained horses. When one pulls forward, another pulls back; at the voice of their master one plunges ahead, and the other stands immovable. If men will not move in concert in the great and grand work for this time, there will be confusion. It is not a good sign when men refuse to unite with their brethren, and prefer to act alone. Let laborers take into their confidence the brethren who are free to point out every departure from right principles. If men wear the yoke of Christ, they cannot pull apart; they will draw with Christ. (Ellen White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 486.1–487.3)



# Complete in Christ Because Christ Is Complete

By Allen Stump

(*This is the printed version of a presentation given at the 1889 HSDA camp meeting held this year at Fall Creek Falls State Park.*)

Have you thought about the word *complete*? The word *complete* is used one time in the Old Testament and only twice in the New Testament in Colossians 2:10 and 4:12. In this presentation, we want to look at these texts along with some context, especially on the first text, and see if we can gain a blessing from understanding our completeness in Christ. We will begin with Colossians 2:10 and for context will start with verse 6:

**As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: (Colossians 2:6)**

Paul states that the same way we have received Christ we are to walk in Christ. How do we receive Christ into our lives? Paul states that we receive Christ by faith:

**For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8-9)**

We receive Christ by grace through faith. To the churches in Galatia, Paul wrote:

**This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by *the* works of *the* law, or by *the* hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:2)**

Of course, the implied answer is not by works of law but, rather, by the hearing of faith. So, we are to walk day by day by faith. The believer is going to be complete in Christ as they walk in him day by day through faith. Continuing in Colossians:

**Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. (Colossians 2:7-8)**

Doctrine is important. God does not want his people to be in deception. We are to know doctrine. Doctrine, however, is simply a teaching. When we think of doctrine, we may think of subjects like the seventh-day Sabbath, the state of the dead, or the investigative judgment. These are important doctrines, for sure, but what about love? Is love

a doctrine? Of course, love is a doctrine, as well as are faith, grace, obedience and mercy. These are all teachings, or doctrines, of the Bible. Remember, doctrine just means teaching. If you look at the early church, their greatest issues were not over the Sabbath or the state of the dead. They understood and respected those teachings, but grace, love, faith, and obedience were the issues of their day, and they play a much greater role today than most people realize. They are important foundational issues of God and his character, and they mesh together with all other teachings.

Colossians 2:7 declares that we are to be rooted and built up in Christ:

**Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. (Colossians 2:7)**

A text which complements Colossians 2:7 is Ephesians 3:17. Before we read that text, however, we know the Bible says we are to take “precept must be upon precept,” “line upon line,” and “here a little, and there a little” (Isaiah 28:10). So, we are to use the whole Bible, and Paul notes that we must rightly divide the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15). That means it can also be wrongly divided or that we can misinterpret the Scriptures. Keep this in mind. The Bible can be wrongly divided. For example, if you remember Elder Albion Fox Ballenger, you know he was considered a great Adventist preacher at one time, but he developed some wrong ideas on the sanctuary, and he listed a long string of Bible texts together to try to support his position. But Sister White said:

**There are many today who present strange doctrines, giving the Scriptures a wrong meaning. Elder Ballenger thinks that he has new light and is burdened to give it to the people, but the Lord has instructed me that he has misapplied texts of Scripture and given them a wrong application. The Word of God is always the truth, but the doctrines that Elder Ballenger advances, if received, would unsettle our faith in the sanctuary question. Already Elder Ballenger has mystified minds by his *large array* of texts. These texts are true, but he has placed them where they do not belong. (Ellen White, *Manuscript Release*, 760, p. 15.2; all emphasis supplied unless otherwise noted.)**

Returning to Ephesians:

**That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, (Ephesians 3:17)**

Every great doctrine, when closely examined, is a doctrine based in God’s love. He only wants the best for his people.



For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (Jeremiah 29:11)

God always works out of a basis of love. To be rooted and grounded in something means to be firmly planted so that thing cannot be easily moved.

Several years ago I wrote a book called *The Foundation of Our Faith*. The book has gone through several printings and a couple of upgrades, but there was an individual in Australia who did not like my presentation very well and wrote a book interestingly entitled, *Stump Uprooted*. His booklet even had a drawing of a stump being pulled out of the ground. To use a title like that of itself is enough to indicate the booklet may not have much content in it. As I remember, there were about thirteen main points to the booklet and every single point was easily refuted. If we are firmly grounded, beloved, people can try to refute the truth, but the truth stands firm.

God wants you to be especially grounded in *agapē*, the love that is of God. In what demonstration of God's love do you think he wants us to truly be rooted and grounded? It is in this text:

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9–10)

A few years ago my son, Hans, died when he was twenty-five years old. Those who are parents understand the preciousness of their children. With this in mind, if I were with a group of people and, God forbid, a terrorist were to come into the place and start pointing a gun with the intent to kill, my first instinct would be to run to that man, not to run away from him! Why? To try to do something to stop him, even if it means I would get shot trying to save others. That is what the love of God in my heart would tell me to do. Jesus said:

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:13)

However, if my son were still alive and were with me, I could not push him in front of the gunman for you. Do not ask me to do that because I do not have that love. I could not do that, but, beloved, God loved us so much he was willing to send his Son to the cross so that we might have eternal life.

I would like to reiterate that I believe we should be rooted in all of the great teachings of the Bible, as well as in the *minor* teachings, but what we must all be most rooted and grounded in is the love (*agapē*) of God. Everything

God does for us, even chastisement, he does out of love. When we have to be disciplined, it is because of love. When we have to be rebuked, it is because of love. When we have to have trials and calamities and even sorrows, it is from a loving God. Think of Job. He could not see the future and know that his trials would be a help to millions later. I want to be willing to honor God if that should happen in my life, but it can only come if I am builded and grounded in truth.

The Bible says the wise man built his house upon a rock. Why? It is because rock is stable and solid. Jesus said that the storm would come, but it would not sweep away the house because it was built upon a stable foundation, even Christ himself (Matthew 16:16–18).

Beloved, we of all people should know that a storm is coming. A storm is coming not just to this country but to the whole world. Right now a lot of people like to come to America. It is the *land of the free and the home of the brave*. Truly, it is probably in many respects the greatest place to live in the world *right now*. A worldwide storm is coming very soon, and we see a transformation happening in this country before our very eyes. Soon the United States is going to be the worst place in the world to be in. We must be prepared for that storm, and the only way we can be prepared is to be rooted and grounded in the love of God.

### Colossians 2:10

Continuing in Colossians, we read:

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. (Colossians 2:9)

The Greek word translated *Godhead* simply means deity.

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: (Colossians 2:10)

Now, we want to connect these verses all the way through. They are talking about Christ all the way. It is Christ whom we are to receive and in whom we are to walk. It is Christ in whom we are to be rooted and grounded. It is through Christ that we receive life and avoid all vain teachings. It is in Christ that we have the fullness of divinity. Do not miss this because it is in Christ that we are complete.

But what does the word *complete* mean? According to the dictionary, the word *complete* means *having all the necessary or appropriate parts* or it means *to the greatest extent or degree*. That, however, is not the best definition for the word *complete*, based upon the Greek word from which the text is actually taken. The Greek word that is translated *complete* is πληρώω (*plēroō*). *Plēroō* is used ninety times in the New Testament, and it is usually translated in the sense of something being full or fulfilled. In fact, it is translated

*fill* or *filled* eighteen times, *fulfilled* or a variation of that forty-one times and is translated *complete* two times.

In Colossians 2:9 the word *fulness* is from *plēroō*. It is the same basic word that we translate as *complete* in verse 10. Verse 9 is a noun form of the word, and in verse 10 it is a verb form, but it is the same basic word concept.

In Christ dwells all the fullness of deity, and we are *full* because we are in him who is *full*.

Christ is everything to the believer. We are full in him.

Christ is our way to the Father:

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

Christianity is an exclusive religion. I do not know if you have ever thought of it that way, but Christianity is very exclusive. The idea of Oprah Winfrey that there are many roads to heaven or many roads to enlightenment is wrong! Heaven and enlightenment do not come through Buddha or through some form of Hinduism. They do not come through Islam, through Roman Catholicism, or through apostate Protestantism in all its forms. Heaven and enlightenment come *only* through the Christ of Scripture.

Not only is Christ the only way to the Father, he is our full sacrifice. He is our atonement.

Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: (1 Corinthians 5:7)

A lamb was sacrificed during the first Passover in Egypt, and the shedding of that blood was a type of the death of Jesus. If the father of the home refused to slay the lamb, the firstborn would be lost. Further, if he failed to sprinkle the blood upon the doorposts and lintel, the angel of death would have passed into that home, and the firstborn would still be lost. You see, we need both the shed blood and the sprinkled blood of Jesus. Jesus is today in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary making the final atonement for us.

John, the apostle, writes:

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the *propitiation* for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. (1 John 2:1-2)

Christ is the *propitiation* or the very gracious means by which our sins are removed.

Christ is the fullness of our faith:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1, 2)

When Paul writes that we are to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us,” he is not being redundant. When you are running a race, you do not want extra weight on you, do you? There may be things in your life that are not sins of themselves. They may be habits or ways of living that cause us to have weights that will hold us back and that eventually will keep us from completing the Christian race. One translation says Christ is the pioneer and the perfecter of our faith. He is our faith from beginning to end. You do not start with Jesus and then take off on your own. You start with Jesus, you continue with Jesus, and you finish with Jesus!

Because of the joy set before him, Jesus endured even the death of the cross.

Christ is the fullness of the believer’s wisdom and knowledge. Paul writes:

For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. (Colossians 2:1-3)

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:24)

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: (1 Corinthians 1:30)

Christ is the fullness of righteousness for us:

For Christ is the end [margin: goal] of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. (Romans 10:4)

Christ is righteousness for everyone that believeth. He is our righteousness:

In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Jeremiah 23:6)



Christ is the full strength we need all the time, especially when we are weak. Paul noted concerning himself:

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. (2 Corinthians 12:7–8)

We are told by inspiration that this thorn was bad eyesight (Ellen White, *Manuscript Releases*, volume 14, page 57.1), and Paul prayed three special times for relief. Paul probably prayed hundreds of times, but there were apparently three special times that he had prayed for deliverance from this problem. Christ, however, replied to him, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9a). Paul, therefore, could say “most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9b).

Please remember, you should not think that your weaknesses are your greatest problems. Christ may make them your greatest strengths. Ironic as it may seem, your weaknesses may be your greatest strengths because then the manifestation of the power of God is more delivered and more exhibited in your life. No wonder the preaching of the gospel is foolishness to so many (1 Corinthians 1:20–27).

Christ, Christ, Christ. That is the message. That is the way you are complete or full—only in him—because we have everything from him. He is our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and our redemption. Christ is everything.

### **Colossians 4:12**

The second text that speaks of being complete in Christ is in Colossians 4:12:

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand *perfect and complete* in all the will of God. (Colossians 4:12)

A parallel text could be 2 Corinthians 2:14:

Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place. (2 Corinthian 2:14)

We always are to triumph in Christ because we are always complete, or full, in him. It is not just when you are at camp meeting and when everything is going well that you triumph, but at all times because we are complete in him. Even when the difficult, tough times come, we can triumph in Christ, for we are complete in him! God wants us to be

both perfect and complete in Christ. But wait, if we were perfect, would we not be complete; or if we were fully complete, would we not be perfect?

Maybe in Colossians 4:12 Paul is using a type of redundancy. Perhaps it is like saying Shaquille O’Neal is a big, tall, huge man. *Shack*, as he is called, is seven feet, one inch tall (216 cm) and weighs 325 pounds (147.4 kg). He is a big person, and we are using different superlatives to describe him. That is not, however, what Paul is doing. The Greek word for *complete* in this verse, like in Colossians 2:10, is *plēroō*, which means *to be full*. The word that we translate *perfect* is *τέλειος* (*teleios*). While in Hebrews 5:14 *teleios* is translated as *full of age*, its main meaning in most of the places it is used in the Scriptures is of being *unblemished* or *perfect*. Notice a couple of places in the Septuagint where this word *teleios* is used in this way:

I hate them with perfect [*teleios* in LXX] hatred: I count them mine enemies. (Psalm 139:22)

My dove, my undefiled [*teleios* in LXX] is but one . . . (Song of Solomon 6:9)

By the way, the Septuagint, the LXX or the 70, is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It was the Bible the apostles used in their day. If you look in the New Testament, you will find virtually every quotation from the Old Testament is from the Septuagint, not the Hebrew text. (For example, compare Isaiah 40:13 as quoted in Romans 11:34 or in 1 Corinthians 2:16).

God wants us to be perfect, undefiled. In Ephesians, Paul writes:

And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled [from *plēroō*] with the Spirit; (Ephesians 5:18)

By definition *to be filled* is *to be full*. If you are filled, you are full.

Now, let us take this concept a little further. On the day of Pentecost, we read the following about the disciples:

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:4)

They were *filled* with the Holy Ghost, or we could say they were *full of* the Holy Ghost. Do you think that the disciples’ experience was static or downward after Pentecost? I do not think it was. They were to *grow* or expand in grace, and their experience would deepen, like the song we sing:

Deeper yet, deeper yet, into the crimson flood;

Deeper yet, deeper yet, under the precious blood.

Or this song:

Fill my cup, Lord, I lift it up, Lord!

Come and quench this thirsting of my soul;  
Bread of heaven, feed me til I want no more—  
Fill my cup, fill it up and make me whole!

If our cup gets filled and if we are full, how do we grow in grace? The answer is very simple. We get a bigger cup to fill, and we increase our capacity to receive! A small cup cannot hold as much as a bigger cup. We need to pray for God to fill our cup, and we also need to pray for God to make our cup bigger and to make our capacity to receive greater, and thus we can *grow* in grace.

Another aspect of being both complete and perfect is found in the *Testimonies*:

Christ is the greatest Teacher that the world has ever known. And what is the standard that He holds before all who believe in Him? “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Matthew 5:48. As God is perfect in His sphere, so man may be perfect in his sphere. (Ellen White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 64.1)

How big is God’s cup? Infinitely big! How wide is God’s sphere? Infinitely wide! Our sphere is finite, and yet we can be perfect in it, as God is perfect in his sphere.

I know a person we will call Rose, and I want to use her life to illustrate what we just read about being *perfect in our sphere*. The thing that must be most perfect is our love for God. We must love him with all of our hearts, and our hearts are to grow to receive more love.

Rose grew up attending the Russian Orthodox Church and learned to love God in a primitive way. She did not have a Bible, and the Bible was not taught at the church she attended. She knew about God and Christ from listening to the priest chant a few things and from seeing the icons. What truth she learned was enough for her to love God and to want to serve him.

Later Rose came in contact with some charismatic believers and learned about the New Testament. She was thrilled to read the gospels and to learn so much more about Jesus and God. Her cup grew, and she was filled more. Her life came up to a higher level. Then Rose learned of the Old Testament and learned about the Advent message. Rose’s cup became bigger, and she was more full and more complete, perfect within her sphere. She joined the Adventist Church. Then Rose learned the truth about God, and she was more full and more complete, perfect within her sphere, and Rose has been growing ever since.

God wants us to grow unto “a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness [from *plēroō*] of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

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Ironic as it may seem, your weaknesses may be your greatest strengths because then the manifestation of the power of God is more delivered and more exhibited in your life.

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A child can be perfect within its sphere, but we do not expect everything from the child that we expect from the adult.

The ideal of Christian character is Christlikeness. There is opened before us *a path of constant advancement*. We have an object to gain, a standard to reach, that includes *everything good and pure and noble and elevated*. There should be continual striving and constant progress onward and upward toward perfection of character. (White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 64.2)

Today there is a polarization happening. The righteous are growing closer and closer to God, and, at the same time, the wicked are becoming more and more wicked and like Satan. Probation will close soon, and Jesus will cast down the censer and say:

He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. (Revelation 22:11)

This is not an arbitrary time nor an arbitrary decree. It is because the righteous have become so settled in the truth, so sealed in the truth, that they cannot be moved. They are so rooted and grounded in the love of God that they will never sin again. If the the time between the close of probation and the coming of Jesus should last one day, one month, one year, or even a thousand years, the righteous will never again sin.

The wicked, on the other hand, have so driven away the Spirit of God that they can never receive salvation. They are beyond the work of God’s Spirit to redeem them. We are seeing this polarization right now, and there will be two harvests, both mentioned in Revelation 14. First the harvest of the righteous:

And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And he that sat on the



cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped. (Revelation 14:14–16)

The Scripture says that Christ's bride hath made herself ready, and she is now without spot, wrinkle, or any such thing (Revelation 19:7; Ephesians 5:27).

I want to be a part of that group. Don't you? But, dear reader, this is not the only harvest. It is not the only reaping that will be done:

And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. (Revelation 14:17–19)

The third angel's message declares that God's wrath is going to be poured out without mercy into the cup of his indignation. We are all going to be in one of these two harvests. There will be no middle ground.

I want you to think about the great plan God has for your character perfection. Please notice:

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. (2 Corinthians 3:1–3)

Now, we come to the key point in verses 4 and 5:

And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; (2 Corinthians 3:4–5)

Since we are not sufficient for anything and since we can do nothing without Christ (John 15:5) and, yet, all things through him (Philippians 4:13), is it not reasonable, is it not most logical, is it not most biblical that God wants us to be filled with all his fullness?

Parents want the very best for their children. They want to do everything for them that can truly help them in life and in the life to come. Why do parents from all nations, tribes, and peoples do this? Because God has put within humanity parental instincts, the same parental instincts that he has. He wants the very best for his children, including you. When he says that he always provides this for you,

when he says that he will always cause you to triumph through Christ, he means it. God does not want you to have half a life or a fourth of a life. He wants your life complete, and it will be complete when you are full of Christ.

A few years ago, the United States Army used the slogan "Be all you can. . ." How? By joining the U.S. Army. I want to tell you something—join the Lord's Army, and you can be all he wants you to be!

I want to encourage you to give your life fully to God and allow his Christ to fill you with his fullness so you can be complete in Christ. 卐

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## Camp Meeting Recipes

### CHILI

Ingredients:

- 2–4 tablespoons oil
- 1–2 large onions
- ½–1 cup diced green peppers
- 4+ large garlic cloves
- 1 tablespoon salt
- ¼–½ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 2 tablespoons cumin
- 2 cups textured vegetable protein or 1 cup quinoa
- 4 (16 oz) cans diced tomatoes or 8 cups fresh tomatoes
- 4 (16 oz) cans chili beans or pintos

Sauté all vegetables in oil until tender. Add tomatoes, textured vegetable protein or quinoa, and beans. Bring to a boil and then simmer for 1 hour.

### CORN BREAD

Ingredients:

- 1 cup flour
- ¾ cup polenta or cornmeal
- 2–4 tablespoons raw sugar
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 1 cup unsweetened almond or soy milk
- 2 tablespoons oil or applesauce

Mix all the ingredients together, being careful not to over mix, and pour into an oiled baking dish.

Bake immediately at 350° F for 25–30 minutes. (Be sure the oven is already at 350° before mixing in wet ingredients.)

Serve hot!

Note: Gluten-free flour can be substituted for flour.

*Continued on page 21, column 2*

# Complete in Christ

By Todd Brown

*(This is the keynote presentation given at the 2013, 1889 HSDA camp meeting at Fall Creek Falls State Park.)*

Complete in Christ is a wonderful and big theme with many aspects.

Within humanity there is the age-old struggle of trying to find one's identity! "Who am I?" Have you ever asked yourself a question like this?

I was recently by a bank, and on its ATM screen it stated that it now supported the LGBTQ community. That made me think: Why is this such a big movement? I believe that part of the issue is the lack of completeness within that community. It goes back a lot farther than all of this, however, because for many of us as young people there was always peer pressure. I desired to try to fit in and be accepted, an attempt to try to find completeness in oneself.

## Where is completeness not found?

There is a lot of molding and conditioning within society from the media, and, of course, in more recent times from the realm of social media. We see this molding in sports figures, in so-called heroes, and in what is trending on *American Idol*.

These and other things are setting the standards of our society, as people try to find their identity. People try to find their identity by asking,

What are my "friends" wearing?

Where are my "friends" going?

What are my "friends" doing?

And even,

What are my "friends" eating?!

Have you seen that people even post what they're eating for lunch? Most people want to be accepted, but many struggle with insecurities. We look at others, especially in our youth, and compare ourselves with them.

Am I as smart as him?

Am I as pretty as her?

From this, we build our identity and develop our individuality. We define our completeness! But is this safe? Is this what brings us true happiness or completeness?

God's word actually warns us about this. Paul notes:

For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves,

and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. (2 Corinthians 10:12)

Christians should not want to fall into that category of people who are comparing themselves with other human beings! Defining our identity from what we see on television, the internet, or social media is not where we will find true completeness!

Maybe as adults we grow out of this, right? Have you heard or maybe said:

*Honey, did you see next door? I believe the Jones' got a new car! And you know, I have been thinking we need to get a new car, as well!*

*Additionally, I was noticing they are doing a little remodeling on their house. I've been talking about that for some time now, and we need to build a new deck on the back of ours!*

It is the age-old concept that we must try to keep up with the Jones!

Jesus touched on this, too, in the Sermon on the Mount, specifically in Matthew 6!

We often think of this sermon in context of having enough food or clothes, and while this is not incorrect of itself, there is more to it. Jesus said:

No man can serve two masters [the world's ways and God's ways]: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles [or perhaps the Jones's] seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." (Matthew 6:24-32)

Your completeness is not found in what you eat, what you wear, and for sure it is *not* found in trying to keep up with the neighbors!

Earlier in Matthew 6, Jesus tells us:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. (Matthew 6:19)

A person's completeness is not in their monetary status nor in material things.

Some people might say that insecurities and struggles with acceptance are inherited or genetic, or perhaps it is because we come from a really dysfunctional family situation or a bad environment! It will be said:

*I can't help it. My father was the same way. It's his fault I'm like I am.*

While we might inherit certain physical characteristics and even disabilities in our genetic structure, can we blame a lack of good identity on family, on hereditary, or on environment? Scripture helps us understand this, too.

Recently I was going through the genealogies at the beginning of Matthew. Traditionally I would find this quite boring. So and so begat so and so, who begat so and so. I cannot even pronounce half their names, but I noticed something special that helps in this situation in studying about Jesus' family history. Matthew notes:

And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; (Matthew 1:3)

Through a twisted turn of events, Judah connects with his daughter-in-law, Tamer, and she bears children. That's messed up!

Going to verse 5, we read:

And Salmon begat Booz of Rachab; and Booz begat Obed of Ruth; and Obed begat Jesse; (Matthew 1:5)

Firstly, Boaz is born of Rachab, the harlot. Secondly, Obed was born of Ruth, who came from an idolatrous people, descendants from Lot's incestuous relationship with his own daughters. Yikes, these things do not look real well on the family pedigree.

What about verse 6?

And Jesse begat David the king; and David the king begat Solomon of her that had been the wife of Urias; (Matthew 1:6)

Solomon is born of Bath-sheba, whose first husband's (Urias-Uriah) murder was orchestrated by King David after an adulterous relationship with her. Things are going from bad to worse!

An interesting point normally found in these genealogies is that the mother is not mentioned unless it is unique situations like these (like being one's daughter-in-law, a

harlot, a heathen, or an adulteress widow), and this is more so a reflection on the man's character than on the woman's!

As we continue through this chapter, we see many kings listed, some of whom were good and some of whom were very wicked.

The lesson for me in this passage is that the past may shape and influence me, but it doesn't have to dictate my future or my identity! In short, we learn here that whether our past is wonderful or wicked, our completeness is not found in our earthly ancestry. And truly, this is a blessing!

... When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. 20 The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. (Ezekiel 18:19-20)

So, if our identity is not controlled by our ancestry, what about our relationships? Many a person's completeness is wrapped up in their spouse, children, or some other relationship. One may think one of the following:

Oh, if I just had a boyfriend or girlfriend!

If I could just get married!

If I could just have a baby!

So many are looking for love in all the wrong places! This is unhealthy, also, because the arm of flesh will fail us!

But what about people who seem to have their lives all together? They have been blessed with an aesthetically nice-looking appearance, intelligence, and/or many talents. They seem to have made their mark in society and are quite successful in this world's goods and standards. As a result, they feel quite complete within themselves. But again, is it safe to use these things as a guide to one's completeness? Does this bring true happiness? Is this why there is such a high suicide rate within the rich and famous? Jesus says:

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: (Revelation 3:17)

Paul notes to Timothy:

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; (1 Timothy 6:17)



All the synoptic writers—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—touch on this. For example:

For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? (Luke 9:25)

Even if you “gain the whole world,” it does not fill that longing in your soul for something more, for something deeper.

### **Where is completeness found?**

We have touched on where we will not find true completeness, so where do we find true fulfillment? Let us start with a passage that is found in Colossians.

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power: (Colossians 2:6-10)

There is a lot here—receiving Christ, walking in Christ, being rooted and built up in Christ, established in the faith of Christ, and praising and thanking Christ, all of which brings us to being complete in Christ!

Let us look at seven basic and fundamental, biblical, spirit-filled principles that enable us to be complete in Christ.

### **Love for God and Christ**

The first principle is having love. Love for God and love for one another is central to our being complete in Christ. Jesus told a lawyer, who asked what was the greatest commandment, the following:

. . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:37–40)

Ellen White notes:

The law of God requires that man shall love God supremely, and his neighbor as himself. When through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, this is perfectly done, we shall be complete in Christ. (Ellen White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 145.6)

### **Faith of Christ**

Faith is so important. We cannot please God without it (Hebrews 11:6). Paul, writing to the Philippians, noted:

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: (Philippians 3:9)

Ellen White confirms that this is part of being complete in Christ:

*True riches are genuine faith and genuine love. These make the character complete in Christ.* If there were more faith, simple, trusting faith in Jesus, there would be love, pure love, which is the gold of Christian character. (Ellen White, *Our Father Cares*, p. 178.5; all emphasis supplied, unless otherwise noted)

### **Seeking the life of Christ**

God, through Jeremiah, gave us one of Scripture's most sublime texts:

And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:13)

We are to seek earnestly, with all our heart, to find God.

Divine power will combine with human effort, when we seek earnestly to be complete in Christ Jesus. The Lord will help every one who seeks him with all his heart. (Ellen White, *The Youth's Instructor*, September 20, 1894, par. 3)

Our study and seeking God will not go unrewarded. As Paul notes, we need not be ashamed:

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

And Peter wrote that we are to follow in Christ's steps:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: (1 Peter 2:21)

The Greek word for the expression *ye should follow* means to follow closely. We will not achieve this without seeking earnestly. We are told:

It is your duty to remove every objectionable feature of character that you may be complete in Christ Jesus. . . Character is formed for usefulness and duty by studying the life and character of Jesus Christ, who is our Pattern. (Ellen White, *Letters to Young Lovers*, p. 76.6)

. . . Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

The verb translated *behold* is in the imperative mood which normally expresses a command. If we are to be Christlike, to be complete in Christ, we must behold Christ.

The human agent is complete in Christ. Learning in the school of Christ, daily studying his life, we become one with him, and reflect the virtues of his character. (Ellen White, *The Review and Herald*, October 14, 1902, par. 11)

### **The Spirit of Christ**

The fourth principle is having the Spirit of Christ. Paul boldly declares:

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: (Colossians 1:27)

We are to “be filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). This is another verb that in the original is in the imperative mood.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

The Holy Spirit seeks to abide in each soul. If it is welcomed as an honored guest, those who receive it will be made complete in Christ.” (White, *God’s Amazing Grace*, p. 216.4)

### **Overcoming with Christ**

The fifth key to being complete in Christ is living the victorious Christian life.

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. (Matthew 6:33)

While we saw the need to seek after God and Christ earlier, we are also to seek his righteousness, and “righteousness is right doing” (Ellen White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 312.2).

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God . . . Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.” (1 John 4:2, 4)

He is to make use of every entrusted power, that he may overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil through the power of the Holy Spirit, by grace abundantly provided that he shall not fail nor be discouraged, but be complete in Christ, accepted in the Beloved. Those who would be victors should contem-

plate and count the cost of salvation. Strong human passions must be subdued; the independent will must be brought into captivity to Christ. The Christian is to realize that he is not his own. He will have temptations to resist, and battles to fight against his own inclinations; for the Lord will accept no half-way service. Hypocrisy is an abomination to him. The follower of Christ must walk by faith, as seeing him who is invisible. Christ will be his dearest treasure, his all and in all. (Ellen White, *The Review and Herald*, June 16, 1896 par. 5)

### **Service for Christ**

The sixth key is service for Christ. Jesus said, speaking of his second coming:

Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. (Matthew 25:34–40)

While what we believe is important and while our doctrines help shape and mold our character, it is our service in these verses that is noted as being the determiner of salvation. We also read in the testimony of Jesus:

His children are to receive that they may give again. Those who through the grace of God have received intellectual and spiritual benefits, are to draw others with them as they advance to a higher excellence. And this work, done to promote the good of others, will have the co-operation of unseen agencies. As we faithfully continue the work, we shall have high aspirations for righteousness, holiness, and a perfect knowledge of God. In this life we become complete in Christ, and our increased capabilities we shall take with us to the courts above.” (Ellen White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 18.2)

If men in any line of work ought to improve their opportunities to become wise and efficient, it is those who are using their ability in the work of building up the kingdom of God in our world. In view of the fact that we are living so near the close of this earth’s history, there

should be greater thoroughness in labor, more vigilant waiting, watching, praying, and working. The human agent should strive to attain perfection, that he may be an ideal Christian, complete in Christ Jesus. (Ellen White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 423.3)

### Unity in Christ

The last of the seven keys to being complete in Christ is having Christian unity.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! (Psalm 133:1)

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:3)

Christ brings His disciples into a living union with Himself and with the Father. Through the working of the Holy Spirit upon the human mind, man is made complete in Christ Jesus. Unity with Christ establishes a bond of unity with one another. This unity is the most convincing proof to the world of the majesty and virtue of Christ and of His power to take away sin. (Ellen White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 30.1)

I know there are many other areas in our Christian experience that will help to bring us close to Christ, but I know that these seven basic aspects can help us on that journey.

I would like to share an analogy. Watching a Super Bowl game, or the World Cup, or the final events of the Olympics on television can be exciting for many people. None of those compare, however, to being in the stadium, on the front row of the bleachers, up close and personal. But do you know what is even better than that? It is actually being in the event yourself. That would be the ultimate experience!

Our Christian experience is very similar. We can have a knowledge of the Scripture, and we can talk of Christ; but it is even better when we can mingle with God's people and feel the moving of his Spirit.

But even more than that, nothing compares with the Christ-in-you, the-hope-of-glory experience of actually being complete in Christ for oneself!

To make it to the Super Bowl, or to the World Cup, or to the Olympic games takes personal effort and discipline. One must have an eye single to the goal! So it is with our Christian experience. There is nothing we can do to earn our salvation, but we must have *skin in the game*, so to speak, or be involved, to reap the rewards!

We see that man "must co-operate with divine power, and put forth his human effort" (Ellen White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 429.3). That is the eye single to the goal!

Paul speaks of our daily experience as running a race, not watching the race. We are to be directly involved:

Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:1-2)

To have that complete-in-Christ experience, we must make these principles a part of our daily lives, and when we do, we can truly experience the *game*! We can find true happiness. We will discover our real identity!

We have talked about things we can do, with God's help, to find true completeness. But do you know what the best part of this plan is? Christ wants this for you even more than you do! Christ wants to make you complete in him!

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. (Jeremiah 29:11)

Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. (Deuteronomy 31:6)

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ: (Philippians 1:6)

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

All the plan of redemption is expressed in these precious words: "For God so loved the world, that He gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Christ actually bore the punishment of the sins of the world, that His righteousness might be imputed to sinners, and through repentance and faith they might become like Him in holiness of character. He says, "I bear the guilt of that man's sins. Let Me take the punishment and the repenting sinner stand before Thee innocent." The moment the sinner believes in Christ, he stands in the sight



of God uncondemned; for the righteousness of Christ is his: Christ's perfect obedience is imputed to him. But he must co-operate with divine power, and put forth his human effort to subdue sin, and stand complete in Christ. (White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 429.3)

Brothers and sisters, Jesus wants to make us complete in him! We have seen where we will not find true fulfillment, but the Bible gives us basic principles where we can find true completeness:

- ☞ Love of God and Christ
- ☞ Faith of Christ
- ☞ Seeking the Life of Christ
- ☞ The Spirit of Christ
- ☞ Overcoming with Christ
- ☞ Service in Christ
- ☞ Unity in Christ

One last point: In almost every one of these basic points it speaks of how these are the means by which the Spirit of God is enabled to work in our lives. The Holy Spirit changes us from the inside out, developing within us that divine nature—Christ within, the hope of glory!

Let us never forget that is not something we can do for ourselves. Most of us agree on the truth about God, and we understand Christ as our Comforter. Many have also witnessed Satan's hatred and animosity against this truth outside our ranks, and many have also seen how challenging it can be to unite with brethren within our movement. Satan wants to keep us fighting with people outside our movement who do not understand God, but he also wants to keep us fighting on other issues with believers in this movement!

Why does Satan do this? He will do anything to keep you and me from truly experiencing God's Spirit within! Satan would rather keep us fighting about who the Spirit is because he knows once we are empowered by the Spirit, he has lost us. Anything to keep us from having Christ as our All-in-All!

So to be complete in Christ, let's get back to the basics with all our heart and experience that transformation that only God can do!



“Camp Meeting Recipes,” continued from page 15

## Scalloped Potatoes

Ingredients:

- 5 pounds potatoes, peeled and sliced
- 1 can coconut milk
- 1 tablespoon parsley flakes
- 1 tablespoon onion powder
- 1 tablespoon garlic powder
- ½ tablespoon Lawry's Seasoned Salt
- ½ tablespoon salt

Mix the coconut milk with seasonings in a large bowl. Add sliced potatoes and mix well. Place in sprayed baking dish.

Bake covered at 400° F for 1 hour. Uncover to brown for 20 minutes or until potatoes are tender.

## Minestrone Soup

Taken from the *Give Them Something Better* cookbook

Ingredients:

- 4 cups vegetable broth
- 2 (15 oz) cans beans of your choice, rinsed and drained
- 2 cups frozen mixed vegetables
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- ¾ cup small wheat pasta or gluten-free pasta
- 1 teaspoon dried basil, unless 1 tablespoon is used as suggested in 9 optional seasonings
- 1 (15 oz) can diced Italian or regular tomatoes, undrained

Optional Seasonings:

- 1 tablespoon marjoram
- 1 tablespoon basil
- 1 tablespoon garlic
- 1 tablespoon chicken-style or beef-style seasoning

Stir together broth, beans, vegetables, onion, pasta, and seasonings in a large saucepan. Bring to a boil and reduce heat. Cover and simmer 10 minutes or until pasta is tender. Stir in tomatoes and heat through. Makes 10 servings.

Tip: If you are out of vegetable broth, make your own, using 1 tablespoon of chicken-style seasoning per cup of water. If you make your broth this way, do not add the 1 tablespoon chicken-style or beef-style seasoning listed in the ingredients.

Slow Cooker: Place all ingredients in a slow cooker and cook on high for 3–4 hours.



# *Youth's Corner – Kidnapped in Ecuador!*

## **A Story of Faith, Surrender, Forgiveness, and Trust in God**

### **Concluded**

Just eight months after the kidnapping, the trial was held. The day of the sentencing, tall military men, dressed in army fatigues and carrying large guns, filled the courtroom. They surrounded the judges, the criminals, myself, and my attorneys and filled every empty space. No one could move.

We had hoped for sentences of between ten and thirteen years, since I was told the maximum sentence for kidnapping and extortion is twelve years in Ecuador. The two attorneys, sitting to the judges' right and left, handed the President Judge various open books to read from as he relayed the details of the sentences. The extenuating circumstance were clarified as follows, in my words:

The crime was committed against a woman. In Ecuador women are respected and protected by the legal system. One police officer explained to me that if a husband and wife argue and the man slaps his wife, he will spend time in jail.

The crime resulted in the woman having a broken bone and multiple bruises.

The crime was committed against an elderly man. The elderly in Ecuador are highly esteemed and given preferential treatment. There are special lines in banks and in governmental buildings for the elderly, and I have observed high regard shown the elderly in these places of business and on the streets, as the younger person typically holds the arm of the elderly and leads them from place to place. Families lovingly care for their elderly parents, who typically live in their homes with them. One does not see an abundance of nursing homes in Ecuador.

The crime was committed and orchestrated by a man who knew of a previous health condition that placed the elderly man in grave danger of another heart attack.

The crime was committed against two people who had been carefully groomed as friends. The master criminal had committed treachery, according to the laws of Ecuador, in that he befriended the victims and gained their trust. He was invited to accompany them on family vacations where all his expenses were paid, and he was welcomed into their home. The night of the crime he was sleeping as a trusted friend in their guest room.

Due to these circumstances, the judges ruled that there would be no consideration given to the criminals for early release from prison on grounds of good behavior. They were not considered trustworthy. I saw the President Judge's hands tremble as he announced a seventeen year

sentence for Allen and the thin, tall man, with \$20,000 due the victims from each man. Their accomplice was sentenced to five years, eight months, which was half of the other men's sentences, plus the \$20,000 in damages. The courtroom seemed electrically charged, and then it seemed to combust with the shock and emotion of the announcement. It was a much longer sentence than anyone expected. My friends told me Allen's head fell to his chest, and the tall, thin man raised his hands into the air in anger. There was a feeling of disbelief and amazement that rippled through those gathered.

Before I could digest what had taken place, an officer stepped in front of me and firmly said, "Come NOW!" I quickly gathered my bag and stood. He took my arm and led me quickly from the courtroom. I was aware of all eyes watching my departure. All the people sat still in shocked silence. The military men were on high alert, with weapons in position, blocking all else from any movement.

I cried as I left the courtroom and met eyes with Allen's mother on the way out of the room. I mouthed the words, "Lo siento mucho?" ("I'm so sorry!") as I passed her. Tears were steaming down her cheeks and an expression of anguish filled her eyes.

Our attorney landlord had come to court the first day to hear my testimony and returned on the third day for the sentencing. He was waiting outside the courtroom doors to greet me with a big bear hug and said into my ear, "This is justice, Sheri!" I took great comfort in his embrace just before the police spoke in a frantic voice that I must leave the building NOW! They hurried me outside along four city blocks to the main police station. It all happened so fast I was dazed! It was over!

I cried all the way to the police station and could not contain my emotions when we arrived. The Protective Services workers hurried about me, trying to give me comfort and reassurance. I cried tears of relief that the trial was finally over and in deep sadness that these people would suffer such stiff penalties and for the needlessness of all this suffering. I felt empathy for Allen's mother's pain, for his betrayal even in his testimony, and for the feeling of being totally and overwhelmingly taken care of and protected by Ecuador's justice system. An officer named Eddy brought in an electric fan—it had been very hot in the courtroom—and also brought me a glass of water. They seemed very concerned for my emotional state and encouraged me to sit and rest. They told me again and again, "It's all over."

Soon my friends, supporters, and attorneys began arriving, and they filled the room. Many were elated with the results and expressed a need to celebrate the victory of justice served. They were not wrong to celebrate, but I was consumed with thoughts that these men were going to be locked up like animals for the next seventeen years! The newly built, high security prison in Cuenca is where they were to be incarcerated. The new prison only allowed one visitor per month, and the visit is restricted to communicating with the incarcerated through a telephone on either side of a thick glass divider. They would not be allowed to shake hands or receive a hug from their family and friends. How could I celebrate?

I felt justice was served and was relieved at the thought that they could not bring any additional harm to my husband and me and that no one else would suffer at their hands; yet, I was grieved at the horrible waste of a life and the years of suffering, isolation and loneliness. I calculated that Allen would be about fifty-three years old when he was released, if all went according to his sentence. I had many times heard Allen express his great desire to be a father. That dream would now be almost impossible. How foolish he had been to throw his life away on the chance that he could pull this kidnapping off and get some money, money that would be used up so quickly and would not quench his need for more. This kind of activity would become a vicious cycle, leading him to steal from more and more people. I could not stop my tears nor the anguish in my heart.

I picked up my cell phone and called Don to give him the news. Our phone call was brief. I could hear the relief in his voice as I told him the trial was over, the sentence was stiff, and the criminals were right then in an armored truck heading to their new home in Cuenca.

Eduardo, head attorney for Protective Services, stood in the midst of us and with hands raised to heaven and in a loud voice told the group of friends, attorneys, and Protective Services workers that this ruling came from the supreme court of heaven and that the earthly Loja court was sending the message that Ecuador will protect everyone within its borders, expats and Ecuadoreans alike.

My attorney and assistant attorney were present in the room. Smiles of victory graced many faces. The amazing district attorney stepped in to hug me and express her satisfaction with the results of the trial and the sentence she felt was fair.

The psychologist embraced me and encouraged me to continue to visit her and allow her to help me recover completely.

I requested the privilege of purchasing lunch for all my friends and supporters. The attorneys could not attend due to their busy schedules, but two Protective Services detec-

tives accompanied us to the restaurant. They said they could not leave me nor release me to leave until five hours after the trial to make sure all the criminals' families and friends had dispersed and until we were in our car and on our way out of Loja.

### **The appeal**

Three weeks after the trial on March 26, Don and I left for the United States. We needed to get away, to be with family, and to have time to start the healing process. It was an emotionally hard trip, as my older sister was going through a medical trauma. Doctors had diagnosed her with only three weeks to live. I needed to be there for her. It was so good to be in the comfort of my family circle and to rest in new surroundings for a while.

We returned to Vilcabamba on May 6. Shortly after, we learned that Allen and the tall, thin man had filed an appeal. The hearing would be May 21.

Three different judges were to review the case with the criminals' attorneys, my attorney, and the district attorney. I would attend the hearing but would not be required to speak. (My husband, Don, was not required to be in attendance nor were the kidnappers.) Fourteen expats from Vilcabamba came to support me after learning about the hearing at the very last minute. I was so thankful to have them there. I thought I would not impose on anyone for this hearing and would toughen up and do it by myself. I was so wrong to think I was strong enough to go alone! The whole thing lasted only two hours but was very intense for me. Each time the kidnapping story was recounted, I was forced to relive the kidnapping over again. I felt bruised and abused by the end and freshly wounded each time. Thankfully, the judges upheld the previous sentence. The judges commented that had the man sentenced as an accomplice appealed, he would have been given a stiffer sentence. It was the only change they would have made in the sentences of the kidnappers. The attorneys left the room, chatting pleasantly with each other. They all seemed to be friends, regardless of whom they had represented. The attorney for the tall, thin man approached me and offered his congratulations for the just sentence upheld and wished me a rapid recovery. He again expressed his sympathy for what I had experienced.

Those who had rallied to my support and had driven an hour to Loja from Vilcabamba to support me, many of them strangers I had met for the first time that same day, gathered around me with hugs and well-wishes. And again I was in tears. I thanked them for coming and told them how I thought I would not bother anyone with this appeal hearing. I admitted that their presence had been so appreciated and needed. Each offered more hugs and verbal support, then we parted ways.

There were no more hearings that I was required to attend. The kidnappers' attorneys had three days from the



day of the written court report of the appeal hearing in which to file a final appeal to the Supreme Court of Ecuador. If they did this, only the attorneys would go to Quito for that hearing, which usually takes place a year later. To date, I haven't heard of any further appeal. It would be pointless for them to do so, since they are not claiming innocence.

### **The Ecuadorian justice system**

It turns out that Allen had a criminal record in Ecuador from 1998. The story I heard from an attorney was that Allen had stolen money from his boss and had fled the country before the trial. He had secured his U.S. citizenship through his father, who lives in New York. Many people have expressed their shock at Allen's involvement in the kidnapping, for he's very personable and persuasive, and they were convinced of his medical claims. Allen had a copy of one of our bank statements in his apartment when the police searched it after the kidnapping, and I wondered how he'd managed to secure that printout. I still don't know how he got my account password. Even from my own computer, it would have been difficult to accomplish. I don't recall a time when my computer was available to him privately.

A woman from Vilcabamba who came to support me during the trial used to work in the court system in Canada. She observed the differences in the judicial system and legal processes between Ecuador and Canada and told me she'd found out that just before my trial, Ecuador had made some major changes.

For one thing, she said all the judges were tested on their knowledge of the law about two years before. Apparently some of them were political appointments and had no previous legal training. This woman told me she heard that only one of all those judges passed the exam. So the exam was opened up to any of the 3,000 or so attorneys in Ecuador who wanted to take it. The top 200 were then offered judgeships.

No wonder the President Judge at my trial was trembling when he read the verdict. He was newly appointed, and it may have been the biggest trial any of our three judges had yet been responsible for.

I know that God was present throughout the entire process. Dangerous men have been stopped from harming others. The police have been very attentive and helpful. The chief of police of Loja, Ecuador, came to see me at my home after the March trial to make sure everything had been handled correctly and that I was satisfied with the sentence and doing well. That was his third visit to my home to check on us.

Many have asked us why we stayed another seven years in Ecuador. The special Extortion and Kidnapping detec-

tives told me there are only about four to five people a year who are kidnapped in Ecuador, making it a safer country to live in than the United States. However, we were convinced that God had called us to Ecuador and that calling was not completed until God made it clear that we were to leave. So, we stayed.



**Sheri Yohe**

We moved into the country and hosted missionary groups. We held Vacation Bible Schools for two Pueblo elementary schools several times. I taught English, music, piano, and guitar in those same pueblo schools, as well as an evening adult English class. When I realized the elementary children had no understanding of how Jesus was born, I brought costumes from the United States, dressed the children as nativity characters, and we enacted the nativity in the local Catholic church four years in a row. I taught them Christian songs and Christmas hymns. The missionaries helped me organize dental clinics and health expos. We went house-to-house, giving large bags of food staples, singing Spanish hymns, and praying with the people.

Now I am a widow living in the United States, where I am helping with a small church plant. I praise God for the ministry opportunities He has given me.

I don't want to go through the kidnapping again, but I would not trade the experience for any amount of gold. I found out when I am in danger and all alone and when only God knows where I am, God is the only one who can save me. He is enough.

### *Sheri Yohe*

Raw Food Chef Instructor  
Health Educator



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Editor ..... Allen Stump—[editor@smyrna.org](mailto:editor@smyrna.org)  
Associate Editor ..... Onycha Holt—[onycha@smyrna.org](mailto:onycha@smyrna.org)