

1 Corinthians 3:11

# Foundation of Faith

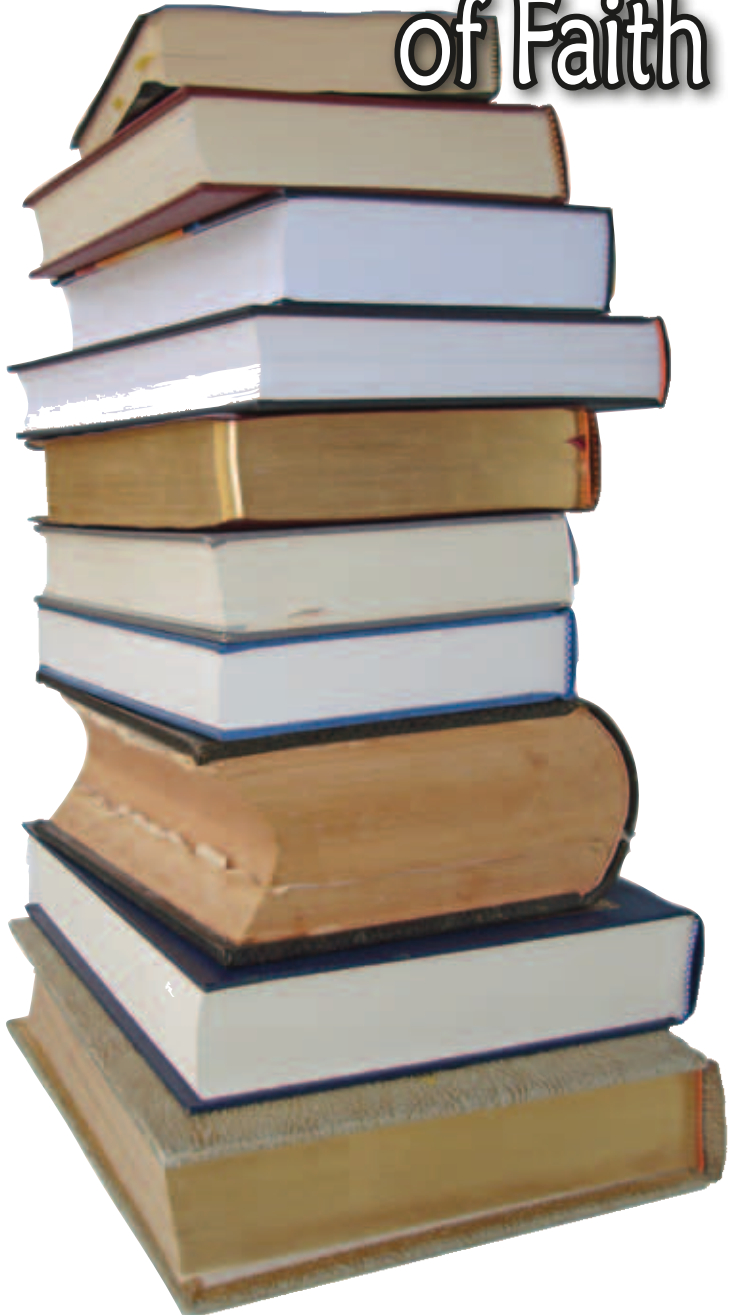
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Fall 2009

**Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.** *Psalm 119:105*

*A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.*

Proverbs 25:11

**T**he Bible contains so much wisdom—which isn't a surprise, when you understand that it *is* God's Word, and *He* is the source of all wisdom. And because wisdom is timeless, we are wise to apply Biblical truths to our lives today. Consider the Wisdom books of the Bible: *Job* who deals with the mystery of undeserved suffering, *Ecclesiastes* in which the writer reflects on the fleeting nature of life, and the *Proverbs* which dole out "common-sense" advice that teaches us, even today, to "live wisely and well."

Some of my personal favorite tidbits of wisdom are from Proverbs—and most of them have to do with the words we use. After all, words are a pretty significant portion of our communication—whether written or verbal. With the ever-increasing use of online social networks, the careful choice of words has become even more essential. If your emails, texts or IM's have ever been misunderstood, you know the importance of carefully choosing the right words. That's why I really value the wisdom of these verses:

*In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise (Proverbs 10:19).*

*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1).*

*Anxiety in the heart of man causes depression, but a good word makes it glad (Proverbs 12:25).*

And then, a prayer that I echo:

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer (Psalm 19:14).*

I hope that the words in this issue will be "like apples of gold in settings of silver."

*Marlene*



## Foundation of Faith

is a quarterly publication produced under the auspices of the Canadian Mission Board of the Church of God.

For more information, please refer to our website: [www.thechurchofgod.cc](http://www.thechurchofgod.cc)

All inquiries may be directed to:  
Pastor Harry Klinger Foundation of Faith  
265 Bowman St.  
Hamilton ON, Canada L8S 2T4.

Editors: Harry Klinger, Marlene Dotzlaw  
Design and layout: Marlene Dotzlaw  
Artwork: Helen Holz Cover Photo: MJD

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Printed by Christian Unity Press,  
York, Nebraska 68467 U.S.A.  
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# *sola fide* **Saved By Faith Alone**

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THE LAST SUNDAY IN OCTOBER is known by many Christians as “Reformation Sunday,” recalling an important event in the life of the Church. Prior to the 1500’s, spiritual darkness had settled on the nations of Europe. The bright light of the Gospel truths had been buried by traditions and false teachings. But on October 31, 1517, Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the church in Wittenberg, Germany, denouncing the injustices and abuses taught by the church.

And in the years that followed, the foundational truths of the Gospel message, one after another, re-emerged, held high by men and women who suffered imprisonment and martyrdom for their bold proclamation of God’s Word. These truths were so important to these reformers that they would rather be imprisoned and martyred than deny them. And today, we must continue to preach the gospel as a guard against spiritual darkness and death. Jesus promised that, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32).

The following five foundational truths which emerged from the Reformation movement are still proclaimed today.

## *sola fide* **SAVED BY FAITH ALONE**

During the Dark Ages this basic truth, namely that the repentant seeker of God's grace is saved by faith alone, had been lost. The church of that day taught that man must "work out" his salvation by faith and good works—completely contrary to the Apostle Paul's words: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

No one can earn their salvation. It is the completed work of Jesus on the cross and God's gift to us. When we repent and accept His great gift of love we are saved and born into the family of God. As part of His family, the Lord expects each of us to do good works pleasing to God. The Apostle Paul writes that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (v. 10).

## *sola gratia* **SAVED BY GRACE ALONE**

Over time, the simple remembrance and celebration of the biblical ordinances evolved into a sacrament that was considered to impart special grace to the believer. This is not what God's Word teaches. Rather, Jesus "on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). Participating in the Lord's Supper is a remembrance of Jesus' great sacrifice. And Paul warns against the one who "eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner." That person will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (v. 27-29).

Today, we must continue to preach the gospel, guarding against spiritual darkness and death.

Similarly, baptism by full immersion proclaims that the believer is a child of God. It is a picture of the believer dying to sin and now raised with Christ to a new life. Again, it does not somehow impart special grace to the believer.

He is simply blessed by obeying Jesus' commandment to be baptized. God's Word teaches that we are saved by grace alone—neither by good works nor by any sacraments.

## *solo christo* **CHRIST ALONE**

During the Middle Ages, the fallen church elevated the roles of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as the priests to higher prominence. The church of the day taught that the priests and the pope are able to act as mediators between the believer and God. However, the Bible teaches that Jesus is the sole Mediator of His Church; He intercedes on behalf of His children. There is no need for another Mediator: "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:5). Those who are called to be pastors, teachers or bishops are His witnesses and servants; they point others to Christ. But only Jesus can forgive sins and add

us to His church, only He can guide and strengthen His children, and only He can answer our prayers and give us eternal life.

## *sola scriptura* **SCRIPTURE ALONE**

For centuries, the priests of the church, who could read the Latin and Greek text, continued to give out their distorted interpretation of God's Word. When the reformers, such as Tyndale, Wycliffe and Luther began translating the Bible from Greek or Latin into the language of the common reader, they were persecuted by the church. As the common people read the Bible themselves they began to understand God's truths while at the same time recognizing the abuses and contrary teachings of the church. One of the rallying cries of the Reformation was, "back to the Bible alone!" Reformers no longer accepted the edicts, writings, catechisms and traditions of the church. For example, praying to Mary—or any of the saints—as a later invention of the church, was completely without biblical support. And we know that the Bible, God's inspired Word, is complete; it needs no new revelations or teachings. (See Revelation 22:18f.) The Bible alone is trustworthy because "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16f).

## *sola sancto* **HOLINESS ALONE**

As the Reformation continued to unfold in the late 1800's, another bright truth shone from God's Word. Reformers including John Wesley and Daniel S. Warner preached per-

sonal holiness for the believer. A believer saved by grace would follow in Jesus' footsteps, living a holy life empowered by the Holy Spirit: "As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:14-16). (See also Ephesians 5:25-27, Romans 8:5-8 and 1 John 3:4-9.) Living a holy life means that all habitual sinning has ceased; the liar lies no more, the thief steals no more, the one who curses swears no more, since by God's grace we are made holy. As Jesus taught those He saved, "Go and sin no more!" (John 8:11; 5:14).

The power of the Holy Spirit is the source of our strength to fully overcome temptation and have victory over sin. It is called the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" or "sanctification" and it gives God's children this inner strength. This happens when the believer allows God to take control of his entire being—his life, his present and his future, to become a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12:1f.).

Let us embrace these foundational truths of God's inspired Word; may our lives glorify the One who alone is worthy—Christ alone. ➔

Pastor Harry of Hamilton, enjoys reading about church history. He thanks God for those reformers who were willing to risk their lives to uncover and share the truths in God's Word.

# Giving: A Study from a Biblical Perspective

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GOD'S WORD PLACES great emphasis on the matter of money and possessions. For example, the Bible contains more than 500 references to prayer and almost 500 references to faith, but there are more than 2000 references to money and possessions. Out of 38 parables that Jesus told in the gospels, 16 deal with how we handle our money. Jesus said more about money and possessions than about heaven and hell combined. One out of every 10 verses in the gospels deals with money or possessions—288 verses in the four gospels. Many of those verses give specific, practical instruction regarding giving. The following pages were originally written as a study guide to help us examine the biblical teaching on giving, and to evaluate our own giving habits in the light of Scripture.

**A GIVER'S HEART.** God does not want me to give out of a sense of duty or obligation. Instead, I should give voluntarily, from a willing, grateful heart, as an expression of my love for God and others. "I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others...So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 8:8, 9:7).

I should not give in order to be seen of men or to impress others with my "spiritu-

ality." Rather, I am to give "as to the Lord," to please Him, and to lay up treasure in heaven. "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matt. 6:1).

I must guard against giving money in order to buy friendships or to gain power, influence, or control over others. My giving is to be done with a servant's heart and the willingness to lay down my life for others. "Wealth makes many friends" and "every man is a friend to one who gives gifts" (Proverbs 19:4, 6).

Giving money and "things" cannot be a substitute for giving myself (time, efforts, life, love) to God and others. "But they first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God" (2 Cor. 8:5).

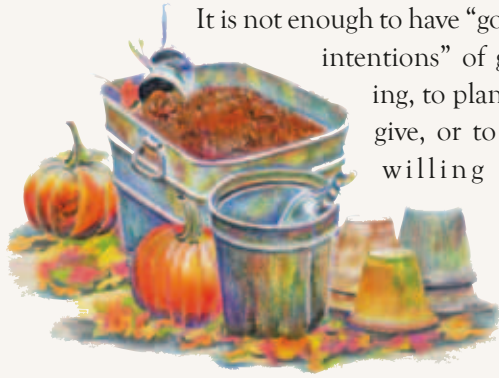
I cannot "buy off my conscience" by giving money to God or others. My giving must be an expression of a heart that has been cleansed by His grace. "Peter said to [Simon], "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:20-21).

**HOW TO GIVE.** My giving should be systematic (planned) and regular, rather than sporadic or impulsive. "Now concern-

ing the collection for the saints...on the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

My giving is to be done without fanfare or attempts to receive praise from men. “But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly” (Matt. 6:3-4).

It is not enough to have “good intentions” of giving, to plan to give, or to be willing to



give. God wants me to actually follow through in sacrificial giving. “You also must complete the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to desire it, so there also may be a completion out of what you have”(2 Cor. 8:11). “For I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago...yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain” (2 Cor. 9:2f.).

God wants me to give today, out of my “abundance,” believing that tomorrow, if I have a need, God will use the “abundance” of others to meet my need: “At this

time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack—that there may be equality” (2 Cor. 8:14).

**WHERE TO GIVE.** I am to make sure that the material needs of my family (including my parents) are met. “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8).

I am to share my “abundance” with other believers who have real needs, being particularly sensitive to the needs of widows and orphans. “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,’ but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?” (James 2:15-16). “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

I have a specific responsibility to meet the material needs of those who have ministered spiritually to me, those who give their lives to preach the gospel. I am to handle much of this responsibility by bringing my “tithes and offerings” into my local church where they can be wisely distributed. “Who ever goes to war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit?...You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain...If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your

material things?...The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel...Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches ... On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Cor. 9:7, 9, 11, 14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Cor. 16:2).

**HOW MUCH TO GIVE.** God wants me to “abound” (to super-abound, to be in excess) in the area of giving. Generous giving should be one of the outstanding characteristics of my life. “But as you abound in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love for us—see that you abound in this grace [giving] also” (2 Cor. 8:7).

According to Old Testament law, the Jews were required to give more than 10%. Under grace, we have an even higher motivation and reason to give. “Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:20).

The giving and grace of Jesus are the standard against which my own giving should be measured. I cannot be like Jesus until I have learned to give as sacrificially as He gave. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9).

Every believer has a responsibility to give. No one is exempt. My giving should be an accurate reflection of how much God has

prospered and blessed me. “Every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him” (1 Cor. 16:2 KJV).

I need to see my times of greatest personal need as opportunities to give more generously and sacrificially. “In a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality” (2 Cor. 8:2). “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over ... with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you” (Luke 6:38).

**RESULTS OF GIVING.** If I give God’s way, God will make sure that my personal needs are met. “Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine” (Prov. 3:9-10).

If I give God’s way, God will provide for the needs of my children. “I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his descendants begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lends; and his descendants are blessed” (Psalm 37:25-26).

The more I give, the more God gives me to give. “Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness” (2 Cor 9:10).

Sacrificial giving enables me to develop greater faith and dependence upon God. “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house,

and try Me now in this,' says the LORD of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it'" (Malachi 3:10).

A lifestyle of sacrificial giving defies the god of this age (Satan-inspired materialism) and is a powerful witness to a lost world of the "Lordship of Christ." When the church is characterized by giving, the "fear of God" falls on the surrounding community: "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4:32. Study the entire context in Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37).

## **Taking Action: SUMMING IT UP**

Take a few moments to summarize the most important things God has shown you, as a result of this study on giving.

Write down three specific steps of action you need to take in order to make these truths a greater reality in your life.

"It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

**FAITHFUL WITH FINANCES.** Proper handling of your finances is the "key" to spiritual fruit in your life. Jesus said, "He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much. Therefore if you have not been faithful in the un-

righteous mammon (material riches and finances), who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (Luke 16:10-11).

Some people say, "I don't know why I don't have a ministry." But, if they were not faithful in money matters, as Jesus says, (paraphrased) "Don't think I am going to commit the true riches—a ministry with souls—to you."

If we cannot handle finances correctly, God will never entrust us with a spiritual ministry. This principle applies both to the individual Christian and to the local Church body. May God help us to be "faithful stewards." →

William Neece, the author of this reprint graciously allows the use of his study on Biblical Giving.

# GOLDEN silence?

Ally snatched one more glance at the hallway mirror as she rushed out the door. Everything matched. Her hair was tamed. She tried not to look too eager. The most popular girls in her class had asked her to come shopping with them and Mom had actually agreed. This was the chance she had been hoping for the last few weeks—a chance to show these girls she could fit in with them —that despite her accent, she really wasn't that different from them!

A mini-van had pulled into the driveway, and Ally could hear laughter spilling out the open door. The promise of fun and new friends was exciting!

At the mall,  
the girls

wandered into one of their favorite stores, admiring the new arrivals and choosing sizes off the shelves. As Ally worked through a rack of tops, someone bumped into her.

“Oh—I'm sorry—Ally, right?” Ally turned to see another girl from her class: Leah. She was alone, as always. She never seemed to have anyone around her, and Ally could understand why! Her hair was in the usual plain braid; her clothes were out-dated and worn and she was always so gloomy! She had no fashion sense at all and Ally was surprised to see her in this store! Ally heard snickering from across the aisle. A few of the girls were staring in their direction.

“Look, Ally's got someone to make-over! Hey—Ally, what do you charge for your services?” The group of girls burst into giggles, and Ally found herself smiling in agreement. Leah turned and left the store and the girls continued on.

The rest of the shopping trip was slightly soured for Ally. Although the exchange with Leah had lasted only seconds, there was something about the whole scene that bothered her. She had heard Dad say that silence is golden, but in this instance, her silence



felt like lead! She could have chosen to be friendly to Leah—could have at least acknowledged the greeting, but fear had struck her at that moment. She so badly wanted to fit in with the group of girls that she had gone against everything she knew was right and made a decision to be rude. True—she hadn't actually said anything mean, but her silence seemed just as unkind.

The next school day, just before the final bell rang, the teacher quieted the class and stood uncomfortably at the front.

"Class, I have some sad news to share. As you will have noticed, Leah isn't here with us today." Heads turned to Leah's desk to confirm she really wasn't there. Apparently, she hadn't been missed—except by Ally, who had been uneasily aware of her absence. The teacher continued, as she reached for a Kleenex, "Leah's dad died a few days ago, after a long battle with cancer. It's been a very difficult time for the whole family and Leah will really need our support. If you are interested in attending the funeral this Friday, please come and talk to me. We'll try to arrange class so that you don't miss anything important." The bell rang. Everyone filed out, seemingly unmoved by the announcement. Ally was stuck to her spot. She couldn't think straight. The chatter and laughter coming from her friends in the hallway was grating on her nerves.

"Ally? Are you okay?" the teacher's voice seemed far away.

"I-I think I might want to go to the funeral on Friday," stammered Ally.

"That would be really nice, Ally. I'm sure Leah would be grateful to have a friend

there. Perhaps you might want to talk to her about going shopping, too. She wanted to buy a new blouse for the funeral and I dropped her off at the mall on Saturday, but her mother told me she came home shortly after with nothing to show for her trip. It must be so difficult to just carry on with normal life when you've just experienced such a traumatic loss. A friend right now might help her through this time."

Ally thought she was going to be sick. A friend!! Ally had been no friend to Leah. First, she had ignored her, like the rest of the class. Then, given the opportunity to be friendly, Ally had chosen to be uncaring. She was pretty sure Leah wouldn't want anything to do with her, but still felt God prompting her to try to make things right.

Ally looked at her teacher with her mind made up, "Could I get Leah's phone number and address from you? I haven't been a very good friend up until now, but I've decided that's going to change—at least as much as it's up to me."

*Our words and our silence can have far-reaching effects. Proverbs 25:11 says, "A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." Let us make it our daily prayer, for God to help us keep silent when our words might be hurtful, and to speak up when we need to!*

Sandra lives in Kelowna, B.C. with her husband Dennis and their children She frequently writes stories for Foundation of Faith.



**facebook (fb)** is an internet-based public social forum which connects people worldwide. Individuals post statuses, pictures, comment on each other's "walls" and use instant messaging chat. Fb is so popular that format changes ignite hundreds of complaints. Like it or not, youth communication has been revolutionized by Facebook and other social networking forums and "web-media" with such names as Twitter, YouTube, MySpace, Twitter, MSN-instant messaging, and Nexopia.

**Let's take a look** at the benefits, dangers and best ways to utilize social networking forums to honour God.

fb is an amazing social tool allowing people to stay connected.

fb can be a valuable resource. It's fast, easy to use and has capabilities that other forums lack, particularly around forming groups, planning events, and electronic RSVP-ing.

fb enables you to connect with long-lost friends, fellow students and co-workers, enabling you to build your social network significantly. fb is also very informal communication and therefore fosters a socially inclusive environment.

### fb - a public forum

People can see it, read it, interpret it and make all kinds of decisions affecting your reputation just by seeing your profile, the statuses you post, the comments you make, the pictures you display. What's your profile saying about you? Does your fb advertise something God wants you to be?

Let's talk about pictures. Start with this scenario: There's a girls' get-together at Jill's house for an evening of fun. Cameras are flashing constantly. All fun and games, right? Until those pictures make it onto fb, that is. Sure they're funny and cute in your private environment with your girlfriends, but think of it this way: posting them on fb is like inviting all your fb friends, and friends of friends, to that event. Suddenly, those pictures become less funny and possibly even inap-

appropriate. Make sure to agree on which pictures are fb material.

### **Watch Out for “Over-shares”**

While it's great to let your friends know what's going on in your life, over-sharing breeds an unhealthy curiosity about the lives of others, even people you're not particularly close with. Romantic relationship posts have the same over-share issue. In addition, over-sharing seems to create an environment of competitive comparison—with users vying for attention with eye-catching pictures, or the vaguest status that will generate the most comments. Essentially, many users are attempting to outdo each other in “broadcasting” themselves with postings that can be hurtful and possibly present a danger to the safety of the fb user. “Over-shares” can also be fertile ground for gossip, selfish ambition and impurity. God's Word reminds us that we are to do nothing with selfish ambition (Philippians 2:3) and that everything we do is to glorify God (1 Corinthians 10:31). Is your fb glorifying God or self?

### **Stewardship**

We usually think of stewardship in relation to money, but God calls us to be stewards or wise managers, of the resources He's given us. (See Matthew 25.) One of these resources is time. How much time do you spend on the Internet? One example of a fb-based time waster would be quizzes. How important are the results the quiz questions, “How lazy you?” or “Are you a lyric king?” While these quizzes are not inherently bad, spending hours determining what four-legged creature most represents your character can't be the best usage of God's gift of time. In fact, these activities can often distract us from using our resources in more beneficial ways. It might be time to re-evaluate your priorities and to set personal limits on time spent on fb. A facebook holiday might also help ensure that you're not becoming dependent on a daily fb fix.

### **Being Safe on fb**

It's increasingly important to keep private information private. Never post your address, phone number, financial information or schedules. Make sure to share any suspicious communications you receive with your parents—safety is number one.

fb profiles are now searchable with major search engines. This capability allows people to identify your fb profile simply by typing your name into a common search engine. To prevent this from happening, you need to be proactive and change your fb privacy settings. In addition, consider restricting profile

## Is your **facebook** pleasing to GOD?

access only to confirmed friends and only confirm friendships with people you know, remembering that “you are who you hang out with.” Who needs 800+ “friends” anyway? Before you know it, cyber-relationships can account for a much greater proportion of your relationships than face-to-face real-life friendships.

It’s important also to be cautious about speech. fb researchers indicate that most youth are much more careless in their communication on fb than any other forum. This presents a particular challenge of making sure that the informality of this social forum doesn’t translate into a free-ticket for careless, crude, and crass speech, remembering that we are accountable to God for every careless word. (See Matthew 12:36.)

Look through your pictures—are they appropriate? Could they cause other Christians to stumble? Would you hide them from your parents? Yes? Then delete. Evaluate your wall. You don’t have control over what your friends post—but if it’s inappropriate or sends a false message about who you are and is not consistent with the nature of Christ—delete it. Consult with a friend or parent when you’re unsure. It might be awkward but it’s the right thing to do.

Use fb to encourage, support and connect with others. Following I Corinthians 14:26b, all things, including our fb communications, are to “be done for edification.” This could include a daily Bible verse or sharing that you’re a Christian in your profile. Knowing that God can see all, ask yourself:

Would you confirm a friendship request from God? →

Lynette Krebs is a university student in B.C. She likes to keep in touch with all her friends across Canada, and finds that Facebook is a useful tool.



# Known to God

This summer our family had the privilege of spending a few days in Ottawa, our nation's capital. Among the many interesting things we saw, one left a deep impression on me.

Since May 2000, Canada has had an official grave for the “unknown soldier.” In front of the War Memorial lie the remains of a Canadian soldier who died during the First World War in the vicinity of Vimy Ridge, France. He represents all those who fought for our earthly freedom, and died unknown to their fellow man.

That this particular soldier was a Canadian has been positively determined, but other than that, we know virtually nothing about him; no one knows his name, where he was born or grew up, his age, whether he was single or married, whether he was a hero or a coward in battle, and whether or not he was a believer. We have no idea what his dreams or aspirations in life may have been. He is in the truest sense of the word the “unknown soldier.” Chiseled into his gravestone are the following words: “The unknown soldier, a soldier of the great war... known to God.” Known to God—what a profound thought!

Most of us have times in our life when we feel like an “unknown soldier;” it may seem as if those closest to

us are strangers, that no one understands us, that no one knows our pain or sorrow, and that we can't share our innermost thoughts, dreams and wishes with anyone. There are times when we even feel lonely in a crowd. Like the unknown soldier, you may be fighting for the freedom of others, not their earthly freedom, but in the “ministerial trenches” for their spiritual freedom. The fact is...

**Throughout time, humans have felt lonely, misunderstood, and forgotten.**

Consider the man **Job**. The Bible describes him as blameless and upright, one who feared God and shunned evil. Struck by successive tragedies that tested his faith to the limit, ridiculed by his wife for that faith, and judged harshly by his friends, he cried out, “He has removed my brothers far from me, and my acquaintances are completely estranged from me. My relatives have failed, and my close friends have forgotten me” (Job 19: 13-14). Surely he felt alone, misunderstood, and “unknown.”

Another example is **Joseph**; sold into slavery, he was taken to a foreign land and found himself imprisoned unfairly for doing the right thing. There he interpreted the dreams of two of Pharaoh's officers. Knowing they would be freed, he asked the chief butler to make mention of him to Pharaoh. Sadly we read, "The chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him" (Genesis. 40:23). Have you helped others in time of need, but your help was seemingly forgotten once things went well for them?

Remember **Elijah**? After a stunning victory over the priests of Baal, his life was threatened, so he escaped into the wilderness, and asked the Lord to take his life. Why? In 1 Kings 19: 10 we read, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they seek to take my life." Can you sense his despair? He had spent a lifetime fighting for the truth, but eventually felt as if he was the lone believer left among his people.

And how about **Paul**? He shares his feelings of abandonment three times with his young co-worker Timothy: "This you know, that all those in Asia have turned away from me" (2 Tim. 1:15); "Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10); "At my first defense no one stood with

me, but all forsook me" (2 Tim. 4: 16). As the apostle neared the end of a life dedicated to God's service, it appeared to him that he had lost every supporter, and that he was on his own.

Finally, let us look at **Jesus** Himself. Upon preaching the truth He noticed that "many of His disciples walked with Him no more" (John 6:66). And during His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane "all the disciples forsook Him and fled" (Matt. 26:56). Finally, hanging on the cross, He expressed a sense of His ultimate abandonment when He cried out, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

Do you feel alone, isolated, unknown even to those closest to you? Don't despair—you are known to God!

### **God Knows Us**

Remember the gravestone of the unknown soldier and its inscription—"known to God?" Those words should give us hope! God knows us intimately. In fact, no one knows us better than our Creator. At the dawn of creation the Bible reports that God created us "in His image" (Genesis 1:26-27). He had the template, but more than that, He is the template! We are not the evolution of some DNA soup or the result of an experiment. God didn't throw us into the air like a puzzle and hope for the best. No, we are wonderfully made, created in magnificent accordance with His master plan, and He knows us.



David was firmly convinced of this when he wrote, “O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know my sitting down and my rising up; you understand my thought afar off. You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O Lord, you know it altogether” (Psalm 139: 1-4). In a similar vein he states, “For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Ps. 103:14). Of course He knows us—He Himself formed us! He knows our strengths and weaknesses, our talents and gifts, our shortcomings, and He knows them more intimately than any human ever could.

### **God Does Not Forget Or Abandon His Own**

Not only does God know us intimately, He never forgets or abandons us. However, there can be situations when we doubt or question that fact. The psalmist once posed these questions: “Will the Lord cast off forever? And will He be favourable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?” (Ps. 77:7-9). In the following verses, (v. 10f.), he answers these questions with statements that

contain solid advice for Christians struggling with feelings of abandonment. He talks of remembering the works of the Lord, of remembering His wonders of old. To reinforce this in himself he also spoke to others of God’s deeds. Counting the blessings God has bestowed on us and sharing those memories with others are powerful tools against Satan’s attacks, and against the feelings of being abandoned, alone, or unknown to God.

The Bible is filled with promises of God’s steadfastness and His care and concern for our well-being. A perfect example of this is found in Luke 12:6-7: *“Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”*

The resurrected Christ understood the human condition and the feelings of abandonment, of being misunderstood and feeling unknown. Before ascending to heaven He reassured His disciples, saying; “I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Amen” (Matt. 28:20b). Amen indeed, and may God reveal Himself to you the next time you feel like an “unknown soldier.” You are known to God! ➔

Dietmar Sedens is a business owner and a father of 4. You may have read his family’s story of their house fire written in an earlier issue by his wife, Tracy. The family attends the Church of God in Edmonton, Alberta where Dietmar occasionally assists behind the pulpit.

# JESUS STANDS ALONE in His Church

There is a very important question each of us must answer in our lives. It is the most serious question we will ever face, because it concerns our relationship to the Creator. It is the question that Jesus asked His disciples, which is, “Who do you say that I am?” (Matthew 16:15)

WHETHER WE WANT to answer it or not, this question does not go away. It probes our hearts to determine how we see Jesus. Do we see Him with eyes of faith as the Christ who stands alone in history as Lord and Savior? Many see Him merely as one of the prophets, a miracle worker, a great teacher, or a holy or enlightened one. But those disciples who walked with Him would have responded to the question with Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (v. 16). They confessed that they knew Jesus to be God’s one and only Son, the Messiah who came to build His Church.

Those who meet Him today in faith and believe are blessed as Simon Peter was when heard Jesus’ reply: “Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (v. 17).

In the New Testament Church of God, Jesus Christ is unlike any other prophet, great teacher or enlightened one. He alone is the head of the Church and at the same time He is also the body of His spiritual kingdom. He is the door to the Church and its foundation and cornerstone. As well, He has the power to add “living stones,” namely members, to the Church (see Luke 10:20 and 1 Peter 2:4f.), and to cast out those who sin against Him (Exodus 32:31-33). He is the only mediator between God and His Church and He lives to intercede

with God His Father for His children.

Jesus alone is the Head of the Church. God the Father put “all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body” (Ephesians 1:22f.). As believers, and therefore part of the body of Christ, we are to grow more like Jesus, “who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies...causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:15f.).

The Church is built on faith in Jesus Christ, and He alone builds His Church to this day. Neither Peter, nor any Apostle, bishop or preacher builds God’s Church. However, this **The Church is built on faith in Jesus Christ** has been somewhat in dispute throughout history because of the words Jesus spoke to Peter recorded in Matthew 16:18-19:

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

In the preceding verses Peter has just stated that he recognizes Jesus as the “Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus’ reply commends Peter’s faith. Jesus then speaks of His Church as being built upon the bedrock of a living faith

demonstrated by Peter here and by the apostles and prophets of old—those whose eyes have been opened by the Holy Spirit to recognize and believe on Jesus as the Son of God.

Jesus gives the keys to understanding Scripture and the power of the Holy Spirit to preach the Gospel in truth to all those who labour to share the gospel, including Peter. Those who hear the message will either be set free by their faith in Christ or remain bound in their sins. God commissions His disciples, as living members of His body, to testify of Him.

This particular Scripture is the basis for the Roman Catholic church's claim that Peter was their first pope. Yet, as we continue to read the text, we understand how this is not a correct interpretation. In the very next verses, (v. 21f.) Jesus explains to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem to suffer and die and then be raised on the third day. At this point Peter rebukes Jesus: "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" (v. 22). And Jesus turns to Peter saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but things of men" (v. 23). It would be contradictory for Jesus to establish Peter as the foundation of the Church and a moment later address him as "Satan." Jesus will build His Church upon the *faith* of Peter—not his person—and the faith of all others who believe in His redemptive plan.

Jesus is also the sole High Priest and the Mediator between God and man: "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all" (1 Timothy 2:5). No other person—no other man or woman has the power to forgive our failings, strengthen our faith, empower our witness and answer our prayers. *Jesus alone is able.* Hebrews 7:25 says

that "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." There is no room for another mediator. He is all-sufficient.

Jesus also speaks of Himself as the Good Shepherd, who died to save the life of His sheep. And we are His sheep if we hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:27). And how do we follow Him? First of all, the Bible says that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

By repenting of our sins and accepting His sacrifice on our behalf, we are born into His Church, becoming "fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:19-22).

What a privilege it is to be a part of God's Church, the body of Christ!

Over the years, I have met hundreds of dear saints—believers all around the world—whom Jesus has saved by grace, who have been forgiven, cleansed from all unrighteousness and added to His church. It is a blessing to be a part of this Church in which He stands alone as the Cornerstone; to be united in His Spirit, as the one body—the Church of God. And it is this Church of God against which the Gates of Hell will not prevail. Those who live therein will live forever. ☞

Pastor Harry Klinger of Hamilton has used this as his second topic as one in a series entitled *Jesus Stands Alone*.

## “Our Father in Heaven”

These words begin the Lord’s prayer. We pray “our Father”—not “my Father”—in this prayer. Immediately, Jesus teaches us to include others in our prayer. God is not only *my* father alone, but **I belong to a family of believers** who support me and with whom I can pray. That is one reason we have our weekly prayer meetings at church. A special promise in the Bible tells how we can bring a shared burden to the Lord in prayer. It is found in Matthew 18:19-20. Jesus promises, “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

“Our” is a personal pronoun. It indicates that God is not only “the Father” or perhaps “a father.” **“Our” indicates a personal relationship:** He is *our* Father. We can come to God in prayer at any time day or night. We have access to Him. He loves us and cares for us because He is “ours.”

We also recognize that the two words “Our” and “Father” are inclusive: Jesus includes both God and our neighbour. When a lawyer asked Jesus what the greatest commandment is, Jesus replied, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39).

The law of Christ is to honour God and to think of and assist others. The Bible says we are to “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ”(Galatians 6:2).

Let us pray for one another. ➔

-Gerry Mielke