

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement
For The Real World

"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."—Hebrews 10:24-25

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Virtual Christian Magazine has been a part of my life for some time now and I wanted to take a moment to share with you some of what goes into each issue and introduce those who bring it to you.

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Archaeology in Acts, Part 2: The Message Spreads

By Mario Seiglie

Thanks to the modern tools of archaeology, researchers have found much cultural, historical and geographical background material that supports the biblical account of Paul's trips through the Mediterranean world.



IN THIS ISSUE OF *VIRTUAL CHRISTIAN MAGAZINE* we proceed with our survey of archaeological and historical findings that verify and illuminate the accounts recorded in the Bible. In our [last issue](#) we surveyed the first 12 chapters of Acts, in which the focus is on the exploits of the original apostles.

We pick up the story as the emphasis shifts to the travels of the apostle Paul. How accurate are these accounts? Thanks to the modern tools of archaeology, researchers have found much cultural, historical and geographical background material that supports the biblical account of Paul's trips through the Mediterranean world.

Sergius Paulus, governor of Cyprus

“So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they [the apostles Paul and Barnabas] went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to *Cyprus* ... Now when they had gone through the island to *Paphos*, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with *the proconsul, Sergius Paulus*, an intelligent man” (Acts 13:4-7, emphasis added throughout).

From Antioch Paul and Barnabas first went to Cyprus, Barnabas's birthplace (Acts 4:36). Historians have confirmed several background details about this account. For example, the Roman orator Cicero mentions in one of his books that Paphos was indeed the Roman headquarters of Cyprus during Roman rule (*Ad Familiares*, XIII.48).

Also, Luke is correct in mentioning that Cyprus was governed by a proconsul when Paul and Barnabas visited the island. Before 22 B.C. Cyprus had been administered by a direct representative of the emperor, called a *propraetor*. But after 22 the island's rule was turned over to the Roman senate, whose representatives were called proconsuls. "Annexed by the Romans in 55 B.C.," notes *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, "Cyprus became a senatorial province in 22 B.C., with a governor bearing the title of *proconsul*, as *Acts 13:7* correctly names *Sergius Paulus*, who received Barnabas and Paul" (1962, Vol. 3, p. 648).

The Expositor's Bible Commentary adds: "That Luke distinguishes correctly between senatorial and imperial provinces and has the former governed by a proconsul on behalf of the senate and the latter governed by a *propraetor* representing the emperor says much for his accuracy, for the status of provinces changed with the times" (Richard Longenecker, Vol. 9, 1981, notes on Acts 18:12-13, p. 485).

Archaeologists have also found evidence indicating Sergius Paulus was indeed a Roman governor of Cyprus. In 1877 an inscription was uncovered a short distance north of Paphos bearing Sergius Paulus's name and title of proconsul.

In addition, in 1887 his name was found on a memorial stone in Rome. "On a boundary stone of [Emperor] Claudius, his name [Sergius Paulus] is found among others, as having been appointed (A.D. 47) one of the curators of the banks and the channel of the river Tiber. After serving his three years as proconsul at Cyprus, he returned to Rome, where he held the office referred to" ("Sergius Paulus," *Easton's Bible Dictionary*, Bible Explorer software).



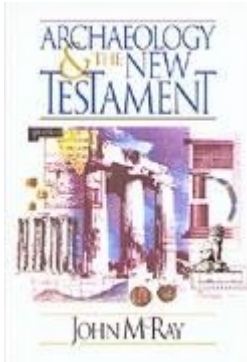
It is also true that in those days proconsuls used seers for advice. "These were intensely superstitious times," writes William Barclay, "and most great men, even an intelligent man like Sergius Paulus, kept private wizards, fortune tellers who dealt in magic and spells" (*Daily Study Bible*, 1975, Bible Explorer software).

To the unknown god in Athens

From Cyprus Paul eventually made his way to Athens, the capital of Greek philosophy. "Now while Paul waited for them at *Athens*, his spirit was provoked within him when he saw *that the city was given over to idols* ... Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, 'Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found *an altar* with this inscription: *TO THE UNKNOWN GOD*. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you" (Acts 17:16, 22-23).

I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.

Why was Paul so incensed with the idols in Athens? Is this an accurate description of the place? A.T. Robertson notes: "Pliny [the Roman writer] states that in the time of Nero [A.D. 54-68], Athens had *over 30,000 public statues* besides countless private ones in the homes. Petronius [a Roman satirist] sneers that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. Every gateway or porch had its protecting god" (*Word Pictures of the New Testament*, notes on Acts 17:16).



What about the altar “to the unknown god”? Has there been any confirmation that such altars existed? Archaeologist John McRay mentions: “Pausanias [the Greek historian], who visited Athens between 143 and 159 A.D. saw such altars. In describing his trip from the harbor to Athens he wrote: ‘The Temple of Athene Skiras is also here, and one of Zeus further off, and altars of the “Unknown gods” ... Apollonius of Tyana, who died in A.D. 98, spoke of Athens as the place ‘where altars are set up in honor even of unknown gods’ ...” (*Archaeology & the New Testament*, 1991, p. 304).

In 1909 an archaeological expedition uncovered an altar with the inscription “To unknown gods” in Pergamum, a Roman province. McRay comments that the idolatry in Athens was so widespread that Athenians built altars to unknown gods so they would leave no one out. “The adherents of ancient polytheistic religions,” he says, “characterized as they were by superstitious ignorance, may have simply erected altars to unknown gods ‘so that no deity might be offended by human neglect’” (*ibid.*).



Jews expelled from Rome

From Athens Paul traveled a short way to another Greek city, Corinth. “After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (*because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome*), and he came to them” (Acts 18:1-2).

Were Jews expelled from Rome during the reign of Emperor Claudius? The Roman historian Suetonius records such an order: “As the Jews were indulging in constant riots at the instigation of *Chrestus*, he banished them from Rome” (*Life of Claudius*, 25.4). It is estimated some 20,000 Jews eventually were expelled, among them Aquila and Priscilla.

It is worthwhile to note this expulsion decree is a key date for fixing Pauline chronology. “One example of how archaeology has contributed to establishing a Pauline chronology,” writes Professor McRay, “is that now we can set the approximate beginning of Paul’s work in Corinth on his second journey. The key is found in Acts 18:2 where we learn that when Paul arrived in Corinth he found Priscilla and Aquila, who had lately come from Italy, having been banished from Rome in a general expulsion of Jews under Claudius, who reigned from 41-54. This event is referred to by Suetonius and others and can be dated to A.D. 49” (McRay, pp. 225-226).

Who was this Chrestus who was responsible for the Jewish riots? The subject has been intensely debated. Since the name Chrestus and Christus are pronounced alike, it is likely that it had to do with the dissension in the Jewish community over the newly established Christianity and the teachings of Christ.

Who was this Chrestus who was responsible for the Jewish riots? The subject has been intensely debated.

F.F. Bruce mentions that Chrestus could have simply been a Jewish troublemaker, but he adds: “It is more likely that [Suetonius] had *the Founder of Christianity in mind*, but that, writing some seventy years after the event and not being particularly interested in Christian origins, he consulted some record of the riots and imagined wrongly that Chrestus, who was mentioned as the leader of one of the parties concerned, was actually in Rome at the time, taking a prominent part in the strife. In fact, what we have in this statement of Suetonius is the dissension and disorder in the Jewish community at Rome resulting from the introduction of Christianity into one or more of the synagogues of the city” (*The International Commentary of the New Testament*, 1974, p. 368, “Acts”).

Later Aquila and Priscilla were to become instrumental in Paul’s ministry. They gave him a job in Corinth (Acts 18:3) and traveled with him to Ephesus (verse 19). They then served as hosts for a church group in their home and sent their greetings to their Corinthian friends in one of Paul’s letters (1 Corinthians 16:19). Sometime after Claudius’s death in 54, they returned to Rome and were included in Paul’s greetings to the church members there (Romans 16:3).

Gallio, proconsul of Corinth

During Paul’s long stay in Corinth his preaching eventually led to conflict with the Jews there. “And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. *When Gallio was proconsul of Achaia*, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and *brought him to the judgment seat*” (Acts 18:11-12).

Here Luke mentions another Roman governor of the time. Has any evidence been found to corroborate the existence of Gallio?

It turns out Gallio was prominent in Roman history. He was the brother of the great Stoic writer Seneca, who was Emperor Nero’s tutor. Gallio came from an illustrious family in Spain that eventually moved to Rome. His real name was Marcus Annaeus Novatus, but he was adopted by the orator Lucius Junius Gallio and afterwards bore his adoptive father’s last name. His brother Seneca, who mentions him in his writings, said, “No mortal is so pleasant to any one person as Gallio is to everybody.”

It is striking that Luke also describes Gallio’s stable personality. After Paul’s persecutors trumped up charges against Paul, Gallio quickly saw through their lies and dismissed the false accusations. To prevent such incidents from occurring again, he had the Jewish leaders punished for filing false charges (Acts 18:14-17). This set a legal precedent throughout the Roman Empire concerning Paul’s mission and the Christian religion.

“If Gallio had accepted the Jewish charge,” adds *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, “and found Paul guilty of the alleged offense, provincial governors everywhere would have had a precedent, and Paul’s ministry would have been severely restricted. As it was, Gallio’s refusal to act in the matter was tantamount to the recognition of Christianity as a *religio licita* [an authorized religion]; and the decision of so eminent a Roman proconsul would carry weight wherever the issue arose again and give pause to those who might want to oppose the Christian movement ... For the coming decade or so, the Christian message could be proclaimed in the provinces of the empire without fear of coming into conflict with Roman law, thanks largely to Gallio’s decision” (Longenecker, p. 486, notes on Acts 18:14-16).

Archaeological evidence has also been found confirming Gallio was the proconsul of Achaia, just as Luke had recorded.

“At Delphi,” writes Professor McRay, “archaeologists found a stone which probably was once attached to the outer wall of the Temple of Apollo. Inscribed in it is a copy of a letter from Claudius to the city of Delphi, naming *Gallio* as the friend of Claudius and *proconsul of Achaia*” (McRay, p. 226).

What happened to Gallio after his encounter with Paul? Regrettably, after Claudius died in 54, Nero became the emperor. For a while Nero governed wisely under the tutorship of Gallio’s brother Seneca. But five years later Nero did an about-face and gave himself to his passions and lusts. He expelled his mentor from his sight. His debauchery eventually caused Nero to become insane, and soon Nero was feeling tormented by Seneca’s and Gallio’s integrity and presence, so he had them both executed in 65.

*What happened to
Gallio after his
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Paul?*

F.F. Bruce says about Gallio: “He left Achaia because of a fever and went on a cruise for his health (Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, 14.1) ... In 65, along with Seneca and other members of his family, he fell victim to Nero’s suspicions” (*The International Commentary of the New Testament*, 1974, p. 374, “Acts”).

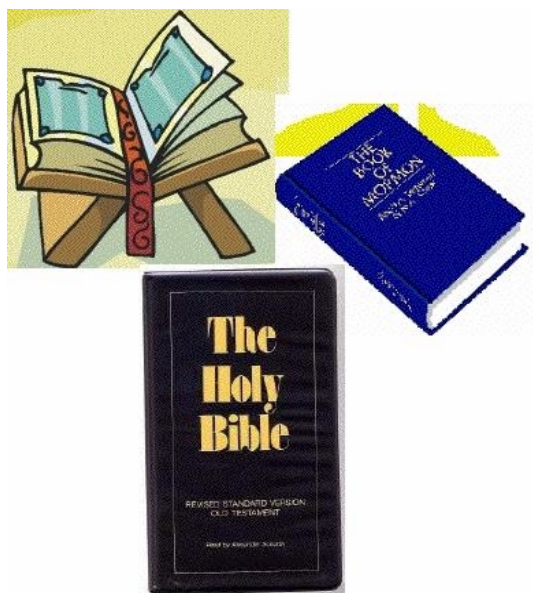
Such were the times in Rome. During this same period Nero began his murderous rampage against Christians in Rome after he falsely blamed them for having set the city on fire. Historians generally blame Nero for starting the fire.

We will continue with our survey of Acts in the next article in this series.

The New Intolerance

By Gary Petty

The Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles has allowed license plates that read "Hot Dam," "Witches," "2Sexy" and "2Hot4U," yet denied a person who wanted to put "Pray" on her plates because it would violate separation of church and state. We see similar trends all over the United States. Has political correctness, touted to promote tolerance, actually created a new intolerance towards Christianity?



THE TELEVISION SERIES *STAR TREK*, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Deep Space Nine*, and *Voyager* have both reflected and influenced culture in the United States for more than 30 years. The programs feature space travelers who “explore strange new worlds and seek out new life and new civilizations.” These intrepid explorers live by the “prime directive” which makes interfering with another culture the ultimate crime.

It seems that at the beginning of the 21st century *Star Trek*'s prime directive has become a cultural mantra in the United States. The concept that all cultures, all religions and all human ideas are inherently equal is the battle cry of those spouting the new tolerance and promoting the concept that there are no absolute truths.

Many concepts considered absolute truths by a majority of American people for hundreds of years are being replaced, not with nonconfrontational tolerance, but with a new set of absolutes advanced with missionary zeal. Just ask someone in favor of the right to abortion if she is accepting of someone who stands against abortion. Or ask someone who supports homosexuality if he believes a Christian who believes homosexuality is a sin is equal and true in his position.



A changing landscape

William D. Watkins outlines the dramatic changes taking place in America's moral landscape in his book *The New Absolutes*. Let's look at some examples.

A few decades ago most people in the United States believed the Christian religion formed the foundation of a moral society, although other religions were to be tolerated. The new absolute is that anything to do with Christianity must be eradicated from all public forums while non-Christian religions are promoted as a positive multicultural experience.

Researcher George Barna reports that 44 percent of Americans contend that "the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths." Anyone who has even scanned these books knows that, while there are some similarities, they are opposed to each other in many important ways.



Another old absolute held that marriage was a sacred institution ordained by God, and divorce constituted a terrible personal failure. Marriage was defined as a man and woman united for life. Children were to be nurtured in this environment of two committed parents. The new definition of family is a revolving door of temporary relationships.

An old absolute promoted that sexual activity was an emotional and physical bond confined to the institution of marriage. The new absolute promotes that sex is to be freely experienced between any two consenting adults, including homosexuals. Not to accept this new absolute is seen as homophobic, which denotes an unnatural fear. Some sociologists go so far as to claim human beings instinctively need to mate with different people on a regular basis, and lifelong marriage interferes with nature.

Years ago most people in this country believed children were a blessing from God, and parents had a sacred obligation to care for them. The new absolute sees children as a lifestyle decision. If having a child interferes with personal desires and goals, then the fetus can be aborted. Not accepting this new absolute is to risk being branded as wanting to enslave women by denying them freedom over their own bodies.

Society's past belief in marriage and value of human life was rooted in a Christian view of human beings created in the image of God, not just a higher form of animal controlled by instinctive urges. The human capacity for absolute good and the value of personal character molded by measurable standards, were seen as ideals worthy of personal sacrifice.

Our society isn't just sliding into a morass of no absolutes, but turning into a culture of intolerance towards many traditional values that shaped much of America's history.

An intolerant religion

If you were to compile a list of intolerant and oppressive religious beliefs, what would they be? Maybe the list would include any religion that taught that you must accept its leader for salvation, or proclaimed that it is the only true religion and deny other religious beliefs. The list might include any religion with prohibitions against homosexuality or strict guidelines for divorce.

This is a true story about the leaders of a Jewish religious sect. Some ministers performed what many claimed was a public miracle. These religious men were required to appear before the national government.

We pick up the historical account in Acts 4:5-12: “And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, ‘By what power or by what name have you done this?’

“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Researcher George Barna reports that 44 percent of Americans contend that, “the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon are all different expressions of the same spiritual truths.”

This new religious sect claimed that salvation was possible only through their Leader, Jesus of Nazareth. Do the teachings of the New Testament apostles of Christ still apply to Christians today? If the Bible is the inspired Word of God, then eternal salvation cannot come through Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism or Islam.

Contemporary Jewish leaders were appalled at this teaching. Notice their reaction in verses 13-18: “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, ‘What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.’

“So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”

The proclamation of Jesus the Christ as the only means of salvation was so intolerant in first-century Jewish society that the religious leaders forbid His teachings.

Christian tolerance

Do you claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ? Do you know what He really taught? If you want to be a true Christian then it's time to read and apply the teachings of its founder. You have the historical account of His life right there in your own home. The first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—contain the story of the man who claimed to be the divine Son of God. Do you know what Jesus taught about divorce or sexual fantasies or obligations for taking care of elderly parents?

Here's a reality check. There is absolute good and absolute evil. Good and evil aren't philosophical concepts, but very real thoughts, emotions and actions. Walking into a school with an automatic weapon and gunning down other teenagers in cold blood is genuine evil, just as is using a tube to suck out the brains of a baby and calling it "partial birth abortion."

Does this mean that Christians are to oppress other religions? Should Christians launch another Crusade against Islam or take violent action against people who run abortion clinics?

No. Jesus instructs His followers to love their neighbors. Christianity is, in a real sense, the most tolerant of all religions in that the followers of Christ are to be kind to all people regardless of their beliefs. At the same time, Christians are expected to take a stand in the public forum as examples of the teachings of the Bible. Christ told His disciples not to hide their light.

Jesus makes a remarkable statement to His disciples in John 15:18-21: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me."

If the Bible is the inspired Word of God, then it makes claims to being the objective measure of truth.

Jesus tells His disciples that if they live and preach His message, people will eventually persecute them *in the name of Jesus Christ*. Many people who claim to follow Jesus actually find His teachings intolerant.

If the Bible is the inspired Word of God, then it makes claims to being the objective measure of truth. If there is no absolute truth, if there is no good and evil, then the Christianity of the Bible is a fairy tale.

A major theme in the *Star Trek* programs is good guys versus bad guys. Most people like to think there is some form of good that eventually wins out over evil, but the prime directive isn't the criteria for determining the ultimate good. The Creator has given us His definition of reality in the Bible.

Christians are called to participate in the cosmic battle between good and evil. This warfare makes the plot of science fiction seem trite—because the Christian's ultimate outcome is eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

How to Make Right Choices

By Larry Greider

Some of the many decisions we make every day turn out well—others not so well. What can we do to make better decisions?



HOW GOOD ARE YOUR DECISION-MAKING SKILLS? Have you ever wondered “What if I had ... ?”—especially when you didn’t achieve the outcome you had expected?

Perhaps you never realized that the Bible is a book about making wise decisions. Not only that, it’s filled with examples of good and bad decisions and their outcomes. It shows that good decisions based on right principles lead to good results. If you make emotional decisions based on anger, lust and selfishness, you should expect poor results.

The Bible reveals a principle that applies in many areas of life: You reap whatever you sow (Galatians 6:7). Sometimes this direct correlation isn’t obvious; but as we grow older, the results of our decisions becomes clearer.

If you look at the Bible as a textbook on making decision, you’ll find many helpful hints. If you want to make right choices, you can save yourself a lot of trouble if you take a closer look at the examples recorded for us in God’s Word.

The first child makes a bad decision

The first child, Cain, born to the first parents, made selfish decisions that led to a painful life. Cain’s decisions led to his status as the first murderer; he killed his own brother and was banished from his home. How did Cain’s life turn so tragic?

“... He [God] did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you

do well, will you not be accepted? *And if you do not do well*, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (Genesis 4:5-7, emphasis added throughout).

God told Cain that if he made the right choices He would bless him. Cain’s offering wasn’t pleasing to God because it showed a lack of proper respect. This short story gives us insights into making right decisions. Learning to put God first orients us away from the egocentric, self-first approach that ultimately leads to frustration and unhappiness. We must learn to rule over the selfish desires common to us all. Cain’s arrogant attitude and jealousy led to a disastrous act on his part—the murder of his innocent brother Abel—and his own banishment.



“And He [God] said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.’ And Cain said to the LORD, ‘My punishment is greater than I can bear!’”(verses 10-13). Cain chose poorly and reaped a life of curses and misery.

A blundering king

Another illustration of choices and their far-reaching implications is to be found in the life of the first king of Israel, Saul.

Saul was confronted with a dilemma when the warring Philistines threatened the nation of Israel. Saul felt pressured to act. The responsibility of leadership weighed heavily on his shoulders. What should he do? He knew he should consult with the prophet Samuel. But, when Samuel did not arrive after seven days (which was when Saul expected him), Saul made a rash decision. He decided to present an offering to God himself, something he wasn’t entitled to do.

Saul was confronted with a dilemma when the warring Philistines threatened the nation of Israel.

When Samuel did arrive shortly afterward, he was shocked. He asked Saul, “What have you done?” Saul replied: “When I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered together at Michmash, then I said, ‘The Philistines will now come down on me at Gilgal, and I have not made supplication to the LORD.’ *Therefore I felt compelled, and offered a burnt offering.*”

Samuel responded: “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you. For now the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue ... because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you” (1 Samuel 13:8-14).

Saul forfeited his kingship, lapsed into depression, turned to a fortune-teller for help, attempted murder and in the end took his own life. His decisions cost him dearly.

Are these examples relevant to us today? Perhaps they seem remote and out of context in our modern world. However, we should keep in mind that the principles still apply.

Don't forget that we exist for a purpose. God created us with the potential to one day be a part of His family. Learning to make wise decisions based on God's instructions is one of the primary lessons everyone needs to learn.

God tells us not to rely on our "own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death," He tells us (Proverbs 14:12). How, then, do we learn to make wise decisions?

Keys to right decisions

- **Seek wisdom.** Making the right choices is much easier when we seek wisdom. "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom," wrote King Solomon (Proverbs 4:7). We are overwhelmed with options and opportunities. But core values do not change. Learning to show respect for God as Creator of all things is fundamental to a successful life. Read the wisdom of the book of Proverbs and make it your daily quest to seek understanding and knowledge and apply them to making decisions.
- **Obey God.** After a blessed and comfortable life that enabled Solomon to experiment with all types of pleasures and projects, he summarized what he had learned. His conclusion, based on a lifetime of experimentation, was this: "Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13, King James Version). Jesus of Nazareth taught His disciples a similar lesson: "... Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

Both Jesus Christ and Solomon knew that the physical things that seem the most important to us aren't all that significant in the long run. In the end, obeying and pleasing God are what matters. That's the only way we can live a truly rewarding and productive life. We should keep this in mind when we make decisions.

- **Develop healthy relationships.** The Bible is all about relationships. God wants us to be in His family. He wants us to learn to work together and get along with each other in peace and love. Some of the greatest mysteries of life are revealed in learning to work together—which takes patience, respect and hard work to build and maintain friendships.
- Having friends to encourage and inspire you can be an aid to helping you make right choices. Often by talking to a close friend or someone else you respect you come to see a clearer path.
- On the other hand, some relationships can be harmful. "Evil company corrupts good habits" (1 Corinthians 15:33). Being around the wrong people will affect your judgment and lead to bad decisions.
- **Structure your life.** Athletes realize that to accomplish great feats they need to practice and train. Some who desire to compete in the Olympic Games or play professional sports dedicate themselves to rigid training schedules. The apostle Paul cited an athlete's regimen



as an analogy to show that a Christian should strive to live a godly life: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:27).

In a world of easy addiction to games, food, alcohol, work or sloth, it makes sense to take a look at how we manage our time. Making right choices involves setting and organizing goals, then carrying them out.

- **Find meaningful work.** “In all labor there is profit, but idle chatter leads only to poverty,” wrote Solomon (Proverbs 14:23). God gave us a mind capable of amazing discovery, one that is stimulated by problem-solving and building. Doing something profitable can help you find meaning in life and make the days go by quickly. Some people in the midst of challenging projects lose track of time and may even forget to eat and sleep.

Remember that God gave man six days to work and one day to rest, which shows our Creator’s intention that we should be productive. Making right choices means we will work toward *productive* goals.

- **Take care of your health.** When you are sick or depressed it is difficult to get excited about much of anything. Staying healthy involves watching your diet, keeping physically fit and maintaining a positive mental outlook. You’ll operate much better when your body and mind are healthy.

Paul asks: “... Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit ...? *Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s*” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). God gave each of us an awesome, intricate gift in the form of our body—and He expects us to take care of it.

- **Daily contact with God.** If you grasp the reason for your existence, then you realize God has made you in His image. Naturally He wants us to develop a relationship with Him. This realization helps us know the purpose for our lives.

When we daily make wise decisions, stemming from a desire to live up to our potential, we make life less pressured and more rewarding. Paul encourages us to maintain this right perspective so that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7).

Cause and effect

Centuries ago God inspired Moses to present to the children of Israel the same choices we must face. Moses directed the congregation of the Israelites to assemble to hear and understand that their choice to obey God—to do His commandments—would lead to life. On the other hand, choosing not to obey would lead to death. “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live” (Deuteronomy 30:19).

May you choose wisely!

What's My Purpose Here?

By Gary Petty

There must be meaning to humanity's mixture of awesome abilities and awful atrocities. What is the ultimate purpose and meaning of your life?



WHAT WOULD YOU ASK THE SUPREME BEING if you could get a direct and immediate answer? A poll in *USA Today* reports that the number one question people would like to ask God is “*What’s my purpose here?*”

With all our technology and sophistication we still haven’t answered the fundamental question of what is the purpose and value of human life. It seems Henry David Thoreau’s observation that most people live lives of “quiet desperation” is all too true.

Where would you even start to discover the purpose for your life? Can you find it in psychological tests or philosophy? Aptitude tests might help you pinpoint your abilities. Personality evaluations could conceivably help you focus on aspects of who you are. But the social sciences can’t explain *why you live*.

The place to begin

The complexity and interdependency of nature around us, the miracle of life itself, reveals a Life Giver, a Creator. Would it make sense for a brilliant Life Giver to create intelligent beings without purpose? “What’s my purpose here?” This can ultimately be answered only by the Creator of life.

Western society claims to have its roots in Christianity, yet the last place many people search to find purpose in life is the Bible. The Bible reveals a special creation with a special purpose. The first book of the Bible is Genesis, which simply means “beginning.” Here is the Bible’s first sentence: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

God then created a unique biological being called man. Genesis 2:7 states, “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

Does this mean that man is just another animal, different in form but essentially the same as a chimpanzee or other mammal? The theory of evolution would lead us to that conclusion, but evolution doesn’t explain the obvious differences between humanity and other animals. How do we explain the human ability to create music and art, discover and use geometry, develop architecture or invent complex forms of communication?

Does this mean that man is just another animal, different in form but essentially the same as a chimpanzee or other mammal?

Instinct and intellect

A slug or a spider is driven entirely by instinctive behavior. The more complex the life form, the more it can learn. Yet the behaviors of even the supposedly highest forms of animals are primarily instinctive. This isn’t true of humanity.



Mortimer J. Adler, in his book *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, makes the point that if we compare other animals with man “a radical difference appears. In the strict sense of the term *instinct*, the human species has no instincts—no innate, performed patterns of behavior. We have a small number of innate reflexes, only some of which are congenital. We also have what might be called instinctual drives or impulses. But, in carrying these impulses out, members of the human species behave in a wide variety of ways. They do not all manifest a single pattern of behavior, such as we find in all members of a particular species of bee, ant or termite” (1985, p. 31).

This ability to reason and make complex decisions and choose courses of action makes humans infinitely different from any animal. The differences between the quality and quantity of the human brain and the brains of other mammals aren’t sufficient to explain the vast differences in function. When it comes to size, some mammals have larger brains than humans’ while others have a higher brain-to-body ratio than that of humans.

The difference between other mammals and human beings—the ability to reason, create, communicate emotions, experience love and empathy—are all aspects of what we call the mind. Adler concludes: “The relation of the sensory powers to the brain and nervous system is such that the degree to which an animal species possesses these powers depends on the size and complexity of its brain and nervous system.



This is not the case in regard to the intellectual powers. That the human mind has such powers does not depend upon the size or complexity of the human brain. The action of the brain is only a necessary, but not the sufficient, condition for the functioning of the human mind and for the operations of conceptual thought. We do not think with our brains, even though we cannot think without them” (pp. 52-53).

What is the human mind?

Brain size and biology can't explain humanity's uniqueness. So what creates the differences?



Once again we turn to the Bible. In the creation account we see that God created each animal “according to its kind,” but human beings are in the “image” and “likeness” of God (Genesis 1:24-28). Creativity, positive emotions, logic, love, abstract thought, communication skills—these are aspects of the mind of the Creator. These are ways in which He has created us in His likeness.

Notice what the Bible says in Job 32:8: “But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding.” One of the biblical prophets, Zechariah, declares that God “forms the spirit of man within him” (Zechariah 12:1).

Both mankind and animals are living “souls” and beings. Both are subject to death, the cessation of life. The difference is that man possesses a nonphysical component called a spirit that imparts individuality, intellect, creativity and personality.

The Bible reveals the mystery that science can't solve. We are physical, chemical beings with a nonbiological component—a spirit—a mind that is, in a limited way, like the mind of the Creator. But, if human beings are like God in so many astonishing ways, why can't we solve our own problems?

An incomplete creation

Why are human beings capable of writing inspiring music and also able to commit terrible crimes against each other? We research into the intricate human body and create medicines that heal; yet we produce nerve gas that kills. We send a rocket to explore outer space but send a missile hundreds or thousands of miles to destroy a city.

If mankind is made in the image of God, who reveals Himself as loving, kind and merciful, why are we so filled with hatred, violence and selfishness? The answers lie in understanding that we are an *incomplete* creation.

Genesis reveals the root cause of humanity's evil. The first humans, Adam and Eve, were given freedom to choose between their Creator's instruction about life and a way simply called the “knowledge of good and evil.” They chose the latter, the knowledge of good *and* evil.

God told Adam and Eve that once they started on the course of self-determination they would embark on a path that would ultimately lead to death. Evil—what the Bible calls sin—brings about

death. History is a story of good and bad, of incredible potential and incredible failure. It is also a story of death. It seems that humanity’s destiny is to struggle, suffer and eventually die.

Central to the Christian religion is the belief that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God who took humanity’s death penalty upon Himself. Jesus also came to supply the missing ingredient to make eternal life possible. On the night before His crucifixion Jesus told His disciples He would send them another “Helper” (John 14:15-18).

The apostle Paul wrote to Christians in Corinth about the missing ingredient that keeps humanity from solving its problems: “We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers of this age knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Corinthians 2:7-11).

Why are human beings capable of writing inspiring music and also able to commit terrible crimes against each other?

Here Paul writes that mankind knows the things of mankind—reason, creativity and mathematics—because of the “spirit of man.” This spirit is what makes us have similarities to God and gives us the ability to have a relationship with Him. Paul shows that to really understand the spiritual nature of God we must also receive the Spirit of God.

The Spirit of God is the missing ingredient in humanity. Without it human beings become both good and evil, lacking the wisdom to always see and choose the good. Death is the natural result. The death process must be reversed and a new nature developed in us. Peter puts it succinctly when he writes that we must become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

God’s purpose for you

Humanity’s problems—from agriculture to economics to education to government to family relationships to individual emotional health—are ultimately spiritual in nature. Real solutions require not just a change in environment but also a change in people.

Our first parents chose to participate in both good and evil. Not just Adam and Eve, but every human being who has ever lived except Jesus, has made the same choice. The result is that every human suffers and dies. Jesus came to pay the death penalty for evil. He also came to make available to people the Spirit of God, the healing, missing ingredient that will change corrupt human nature into divine nature.

What is your ultimate destiny? What awaits those who are willing to be changed by God’s Spirit from corrupted human nature to become partakers of the divine?

The Creator says you can enjoy a Father-child relationship with Him now.

Paul explains in Romans 8:14-17: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit [itself] bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

The purpose of humanity is to become the spiritual children of God! The purpose for your life is more than making money, gaining social status and wearing the right clothes. The coupling of the human spirit with the Spirit of God makes possible the development of a new nature and eventually a resurrection to a new life as eternal children of God, joint heirs with Jesus of all things.

This is the potential of every human being.

But this isn’t just a nebulous promise of something in the far-off future. The Creator says you can enjoy a Father-child relationship with Him now. There are real solutions to your problems. There is hope for those willing to discover their true purpose. The first step on that road of discovery is to turn to the Creator and His instruction book.

Unlocking the Mind

Hungarian-born Joseph Kovach was only 15 when he was sent to a Russian prison. He spent four years in a bleak and meaningless world. Dr. Kovach later said: “When I look at the months, the years, they were empty. There’s nothing in terms of thinking, of planning, of remembering the past or planning for the future. It felt almost as though I was hibernating” (*The Mind*, Richard M. Restak, M.D., 1988, p. 271).

Eventually, he was moved to a *gulag* that contained a small library. Reading opened his mind to ideas and creativity. When he was finally released, Dr. Kovach moved to the United States, where he attended the University of Chicago.

In the landmark Public Broadcasting System series *The Mind*, Dr. Kovach concluded: “Ultimately, it is our mental apparatus, our capacity to think, our capacity to deal with ideas, our capacity to find unities, coherences in variations—that’s what makes us human. We have a way of creating worlds for ourselves, in our heads, and sharing those worlds” (p. 273).

What Makes Humans Different?

What makes us human? Consider some of the ways mankind differs from the animal kingdom.

- **Self-consciousness and intelligence.** The human mind gives us capacity for reasoned thought. Instinct isn’t the driving force that determines our behavior. This ability leads us to search for meaning in our individual lives as well as

searching for purpose in life. Every culture produces its own religions, myths and philosophies. We even have a need to find meaning and purpose in suffering. It isn't enough for people to accept suffering. Even the youngest mind wants to know why the pet dog died or why God allows people to get sick. This leads us to another human trait: the capacity for empathy and sharing another's suffering.

- **The ability to think and plan in time.** It's an amazing aspect of the human mind to think in terms of past, present and future. We have aspirations to achieve, set goals and organize relative to time. When was the last time you saw a gorilla or chimp open his calendar and make an appointment? This leads us to the capacity to conceive of our own death. From the funeral pyres of ancient civilizations to modern funerals, we are ever searching for meaning in death. We are ever searching for a hope in an afterlife. Such concepts are foreign to animals.
- **Creativity.** Human beings are unlike other creatures in their concepts and development of art, music and literature. Beavers through instinct build the same types of dams generation after generation. There isn't a raging river on the globe that mankind cannot dam and use to create electricity. Our creative abilities allow us to adapt to situations and solve new problems.
- **The ability to think abstractly.** An architect can visualize a skyscraper, draw lines on a piece of paper called a blueprint, then pass along the blueprint to a builder who studies the lines and constructs the vision that existed only in the mind of the architect. Much human learning is through the five senses. Yet the human mind stretches beyond the senses to encompass concepts including infinity, liberty, beauty and humor.
- **The ability to create languages.** Human beings comprehend connections between large numbers of words, including the ability to learn languages, even so-called animal languages.
- **The ability to create economic systems.** Humans have the desire to work and be productive, to barter, exchange and set up economic systems.
- **The capacity for scientific thought.** This includes experimentation and development of theories.
- **The ability to perform mathematical problems and construct computers.**
- **The desire to find meaning in sex beyond procreation.**
- **The ability to consciously change our environment, personality, character, habits, even physical appearance.**
- **The ability to experience emotions such as happiness, joy, peace and, conversely, depression and despair.**
- **The ability to conceive of morality.** Because human beings can conceive of a choice between inherently right and inherently wrong behavior, we have a capacity for a relationship with God.

Why Were You Born?

By Robert Berendt

Time and chance have a part in who we are. But God is not so concerned about where we came from as where we can go.



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF OUR EXISTENCE? Is there a destiny for mankind, and what is your personal part in that? Why do we live at all? These are heavy questions, and yet people give very little time to pondering them. Most people just “leave it to God” to decide what their fate will be for the eternity that stretches ahead of us all. Almost all hope there will be a different continuation of existence, but seem afraid or unwilling to confront these most basic of questions.

A matter of chance

It is a little daunting to recognize the true fact that our personal existence has been a matter of chance. Women have many thousands of ova and men deliver millions of sperm so that each pregnancy is unique—only one of a myriad of possibilities. Another ova or sperm and you would not exist. The chance meeting of your parents is another factor in the long list of items that could have meant that another human other than yourself could have been born. My mother had six children, but the potential for having any six out of uncountable possibilities shows that most of us can say we are a product of time and chance. Some people were born due to the criminal act of rape, some because of unwanted pregnancies, some through careful family planning. In all cases, you—that is the real you—were not designed; the pregnancy could have resulted in someone else being born. But it is you who live, and that is where we should start.

A thousand years from now, we will be where our choices have taken us. Paul writes about this theme in several places.

Ecclesiastes 9:11 tells us that the “race is not to the swift, not the battle to the strong ...; but time and chance happen to them all.” A swift runner may stumble, a strong army may make a strategic error and be beaten. The powerful Spanish Armada of a few centuries ago ran into a horrific storm and was thus defeated. All of us can attest to time and chance in many events in our lives. Our birth and development has many elements of time and chance that form and fashion us.

Prince Charles and his son Prince William have a potential destiny to become kings.

The fact we can face and accept is that we do exist. We have some control over our actions and that is the area in which we need to exert ourselves. Some people are born with a destiny in this life. Prince Charles and his son Prince William have a potential destiny to become kings. This destiny still contains the elements of time and chance. An airplane crash or disease could change all that potential. God sometimes reaches in and directly intervenes in the arena of life. In Jeremiah 1:5 we read how God inspired Jeremiah to write that God had formed Jeremiah and sanctified him before he was born. Of course, God was directly involved in the development of Jesus Christ from pregnancy onward.



God has set in motion laws of growth and development for every fetus as it is formed in the womb. On occasion, He has specifically designed a person to be born. We can think of Samuel, Cyrus and others. Paul said he was “separated” from his mother’s womb. The meaning here would be more to the effect that God developed them for a special mission in life. John the Baptist would also be a very special example. In John’s case, God was instrumental in his conception, birth and later education and development. Of course, one could say that God is always involved since everything functions

within His physical laws. God also does work with the products that history provides without totally controlling all that occurs. From that point of view, we need not be overly concerned about where we came from—but rather about where we can go. What is our possible or potential destiny?

Choosing our destiny

A thousand years from now, the only important item will be the fulfillment of our destiny. God tells us in the Bible that He is deeply involved in our future, but He does not dictate every detail of that future. In 2 Peter 3:9 God tells us that it is His will that none should perish. He wants all mankind to be saved. In 1 Peter 1:3-10 we read that God’s intention is to give humans an eternal inheritance. Peter goes on to say that we are to mend our ways and conform to God’s standards of holiness. In verse 15 Peter states we are to be holy in all our conduct. Salvation is not automatic. God has opened a door to allow freedom of choice for mankind. He remains in full control, but has taken a step back to allow humans to impact this earth. He allows error and evil with the hope that we will learn to hate evil and all that is ungodly. Humans have a part to play in their own destiny. If that were not so, we would not have freedom.

A thousand years from now, we will be where our choices have taken us. Paul writes about this theme in several places. In Romans 8:5 he tells us to set our minds on “the things of the Spirit.” That is a conscious act. We are to learn God’s way and choose that as a guide for all our actions. It is only when we obey God that He can bless us. That is one of the major lessons that we see from a study of the nation of Israel and its kings. In 1 Kings 3:14 we find one of the many places where God states: “If you walk in My ways,” you will be blessed. King Solomon strayed and the outcome was the destruction of the combined land of Israel. The same “If-then” scenario can be found throughout the Bible. Thus it is clear that God offers a wonderful destiny for all humans. He is working to make that possible, and because He gives us freedom of choice, He encourages us to work toward that destiny by learning of Him and obeying Him. Accepting the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is vital in this path as it leads to the Holy Spirit working in our lives.



God states: “If you walk in My ways,” you will be blessed. King Solomon strayed and the outcome was the destruction of the combined land of Israel.

Parents know that children are not able to make right or wise choices until they have learned what danger means and are able to judge and act wisely. God sees the same need for development in us all. We need to know what sin is (by God’s definition) before we can repent of it. We need to know what pleases God before we can act to please Him. We need to be mature enough to control our thoughts and decisions before we can make wise actions. We all know that it takes time and education for this maturity to arrive. A Christian also develops as he or she studies and practices living according to God’s laws.

Walking with Jesus Christ and following His footsteps gives us a guideline for development. Conversion is a process that continues through life. Jesus told His disciple Peter to help others when he was converted (Luke 22:32). It took Peter decades to conquer his carnal self.

God does exist. Our lives are temporary. Eternity lies ahead. Since eternity is infinitely longer than our life span, we ought to be working toward ensuring that our destiny is what God offers. Matthew 25:30 is a verse that indicates that some who have made wrong choices have chosen a destiny that they will regret. The weeping and gnashing of teeth may be the result of realizing how gentle and loving God was and how every chance was given to each person to receive the wonderful gift of eternal life.

[Click here](#) to order our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* (or [read it online](#)) and put your mind to work. A thousand years from now, you will be glad you did.

*Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial***Who's Behind VCM?**

By Lorelei Nettles

Virtual Christian Magazine has been a part of my life for some time now and I wanted to take a moment to share with you some of what goes into each issue and introduce those who bring it to you.

**Beginnings**

I RECENTLY BECAME THE MANAGING EDITOR of *Virtual Christian Magazine*, or VCM as we call it, but its origins go back to 1997. Its founder and the former managing editor is Victor Kubik. He saw the Internet as a great way to reach out to others, a place for uplifting stories, hope and encouragement and an opportunity for some of the unknown authors within the church. Readership grew from there and in 1999 the Web site became a part of the United Church of God family of Web sites.



V. Kubik

A few of us have been with VCM since its beginning, some came on board later to improve the process and others have replaced those who have since gone on to other things. New volunteers who have the time and editing skills are always welcome to join us.

The process

Articles are received through our staff; are sent in through ministers or come in through the feedback link on the Web site. Articles are welcome to be submitted at any time this way. We are always happy to receive new material. Submitted articles must have a full name and include where the author attends church. These submitted articles are received by the managing editor and placed on file for possible future use. Not all articles are accepted and/or chosen for use. Each chosen article then goes through a review and editing process before it is posted.

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Each month one of the staff may volunteer to be the issue editor or I do it myself. The issue editor then chooses articles for use in that month's issue. The articles chosen are then sent to our review team and then through the editing, imagery and final proofreading process. They are then sent to our Web master who lays it all out for you to see in its final format.

The staff



D. Henson, J. Elliott, T. Damour, D. Hooser

Our review team consists of four men. They are: Don Henson in Pennsylvania, who has been with us for about three years; Jack Elliott in East Texas, who has been with us since late 1998; Tom Damour, also from Texas, who has been with us about a year and a half; and finally Don Hooser, another Texan, who has been with us since 2000.

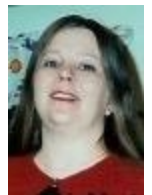
They review each of the articles that are planned for VCM, and ultimately approve each of them for any given issue. No articles go forward without their final approval.

Articles are then sent to an editor to refine the copy for posting. They correct spelling, make sure punctuation is correct and just give the article a professional look. Our newest editor is Patrick Kansa in Michigan, who started with us five months ago. Another fairly new editor is Michelle Grovak in Indiana. With the staff since 2001 is Jada Howell in Missouri. Our two veteran editors are John Rutis in Oregon and Mike Bennett in Ohio, who have been with us since our beginnings in 1997. The whole process would just fall apart without all of these people's time and hard work.



P. Kansa, M. Grovak, J. Howell, J. Rutis

Articles are also sent to me, Lorelei Nettles, in Kansas to find images. I have been with VCM since the beginning in 1997 and was named managing editor about seven months ago.



L. Nettles

After all of that has been completed, the articles are sent to Becky Bennett in Ohio. And yes, she is related to Mike Bennett mentioned above, they are husband and wife. Becky has been working with the staff since May of 2000 and does the final proofreading before articles are sent to the last person on our list of staff.



C. Rowland

That would be Chris Rowland. Chris has been with *VCM* from the beginning, and he is really a valuable player on the team. His skills are what give the *VCM* Web site its great look. He sets the articles and images, places the highlights and in general keeps the Web site up and running well. If we want to change the site, he is the one who we turn to with ideas and questions.

So you see that there are many people involved in the *VCM* process, and I have not even included the names or given the credit due to all the authors involved. It is their messages we wish to pass on to you, and it is impossible to cover them all in this space. I would also be neglecting all the future authors yet to be seen on the site.

*The process would
just fall apart
without all of these
people's time and
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While this has been a short overview of what the process is like, I hope that it gives you an idea of how it all basically works. We enjoy sharing *Virtual Christian Magazine* with you each month and we hope you enjoy reading it as well. We would love to hear from you—feel free to contact us through the Web site feedback link.

VCM is strictly an Internet-based magazine, but feel free to print out the articles to share or keep, using the PDF link to the left of your screen. We hope you will make this site a regular stop while you're surfing the Web and that you'll also visit the other United Church of God Web sites. Remember all the literature you see offered on our site is free for the asking; just click the literature links to pull up the order screen. There is no further obligation and you will not be contacted unless you want to be.

Have a wonderful month and enjoy your visit.

Letters to the Editor

Enjoys *VCM*



Every time I take a few minutes to read your articles, I find them very helpful, encouraging and often something I can share with others. Thank you so very much.

— Pamela Bartholomew



I enjoyed reading your articles in volume 4 of the *Virtual Christian Magazine*. I thank you for your magazine, because it has helped me to understand why I am here. I have always believed we should keep all of the commandments.

— Helen Bryant

[My Service Was a Waste!](#)



Thank you for the article. When I think of recognition of service, I think about the principle of not letting your left hand know what your right hand is doing.

For our works, our reward is in heaven. We don't have to have a pat on the back for building character and other benefits that come out of serving. The less kudos we get for our services now, I think the greater the reward will be in heaven.

Even though when you are on the receiving end, you should be appreciative. Those kinds of twinges of wistfulness, should remind us how important it is for us to show what we desire.

Serving gives experiences that may qualify you for bigger responsibilities that you may enjoy more.

— Jeannette

[Fantastic Articles](#)



I was really delighted to see such fantastic articles in the June 2003 VCM dealing with the need for the father in the family such as [“Whatever Happened to Father in Children’s Literature”](#) by Jean Jantzen and [“Successful Parenting Begins with the Brain”](#) by Howard Davis.

I have noted the total lack of men’s magazines for example that deal with family issues such as how to be a better father and husband and the need for men to spend time bonding with their children. I even notice the absence of men's Bible studies that would help men deal with this most pressing need.

— Marilyn Braley

Letters may be edited for length and clarity.