

THE EDIFIER

Church of God (Seventh Day) Australia

June 2024

Beauty and Complexity

The Joy of the Lord

Prescriptive or Descriptive

Remember, Forgetfulness

Staying True to Christ

A magazine dedicated to uplifting
and transforming peoples' lives
through the uncompromised Word of God

THE EDIFIER



The truth will make you free

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Photo of scenic, winding road through the south west tall timber country in Western Australia. The picturesque scene serves as a metaphor of those who follow Christ, trusting Him in whatever awaits around the next bend in the road.

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From the Editor

Never underestimate the power of God's grace, His forbearance, patience, love and redemptive will. We are recipients of His grace, no more clearly demonstrated than in the price our heavenly Father was prepared to pay in sending His Son into the world to fulfill what no one else could do.

Jesus became the substitutionary sacrificial Lamb to pay for the sins of the world, so that you and I, having come out from the world, could be redeemed from God's ultimate judgment and wrath, and enter into eternal life and fellowship.

Thus, because of Jesus, we have direct access to our heavenly Father, in order to access "grace and mercy in time of need."

The enterprise of grace is expensive, as it cost the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus took on our sin, and in exchange attributes to us the free gift of His righteousness. Thus, "we are saved by grace through faith, and not through works," as the apostle Paul refreshingly states.

As a result, we have a responsibility to pay this grace forward. In fact, Jesus insisted that unless we forgive others, our own forgiveness is withheld from above!

Our emerging authenticity, redemption and beauty is not external, but internal, manifested by hearts of love, joy and peace. We forebear with one another, minister to each other's needs, and carry each other's concerns in prayer.

Church life is experienced in community, truth and grace, and as such, we reflect the Kingdom of God in microcosm. Each of us are the closest many will experience Jesus. Your life is the only Bible people may read. What you say may be the only gospel they hear.

In this edition of The Edifier, we again write to inspire, edify and encourage. We pray that many more lives are transformed through receiving and believing Jesus, repentance and the ongoing process of redemption. May God's goodness, and our participation and stewardship in His expensive grace, yield and bear much fruit. □

*John Klassek
Spencers Brook, WA*



Beauty, Complexity and God

Where does beauty come from?

A beautiful piece of art comes from the mind and hand of an artist. A beautiful house comes from the efforts of designers and builders. A beautiful poem comes from a poet.

Where does complexity come from? A sculpture of a bird comes from the hand of a sculptor. An aircraft is produced by a large team of designers and workers. An intricate computer is designed and manufactured through human intelligence and ingenuity.

But where, according to mainstream scientists, does the far surpassing beauty and complexity of the natural world wholly emanate from – not a shred of intelligence! Does it make sense to you a sculpture of a bird needs a creator, but the first flying creature didn't? Does it make

sense the world's first life-form capable of reproducing itself (far more complex than anything our brilliant scientists can create) came into existence without a maker?

Why you may wonder is this great deception widely perpetuated? I believe it is simply because many do not like the idea of responsibility to a Creator whose moral standards conflict with theirs. Like disobedient children, we dislike being told what to do, so scientists have to engage in the vain task of explaining the awe, wonder and mysteries of the universe without the existence of God.

If we want real and satisfying answers for where we came from, where we're going, and for solving the world's problems, all we need do is bring God back into the equation!

*David Kidd
New Zealand*

Living in the

We are the redeemed children of God. And as such, what is one essential characteristic that people should see in us? Joy!

Joy, not just from our Blessed Hope in Christ Jesus' return, but day-to-day joy should be evident in us as His redeemed and Spirit-led children.

Consider where is our joy? Is it a constant reality or fleeting moment? Have we ever been robbed of our joy? If so, how?

The ultimate assault on our mind is our attention. Our ultimate enemy is Satan, who attacks our minds through worldly distractions. Keeping our focus on Christ enables us to resist the power of the evil one.

"...And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ." (1 John 5:19-20 ESV)

When we lose focus, the enemy tempts us towards sin. He seeks our weak points and exploits them. Whatever grabs our attention excessively can become an unhealthy fixation, leading us away from God and taking us away from maturing in faith.

Temptation is constant. The enemy's influence is everywhere, trying to control us. Resisting temptation is a battle, but we are not left without a battle plan. Keeping our focus on Jesus Christ and His Truth enables us to recognise the enemy. Only then will we be able to resist "...that ancient serpent

called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray." (Revelation 12:9 NIV)

Weakened focus on Christ creates opportunities for the adversary to exploit our vulnerabilities, and our ability to resist temptation will be tested. The enemy strategically searches for our weak points and, if he is successful in misdirecting our attention, will lead us back to revisit past sins. Subsequently, that which has caught our attention causes us to develop an obsessive attachment to someone or something.

Consider this: what is an "obsessive attachment?"

Here are just a few examples:

Consuming unhealthy food/drink when lonely or bored? Watching hours of useless ungodly television or media? Listening to popular highly sexualised music? Obsessing over an ungodly but attractive man or woman? Despising someone for the hurt they may have caused you? Wanting more money or worrying that you'll never have enough?

These few examples may seem trite but can become destructively obsessive causing a great distraction from God and your loss of joy.

Whatever ungodly things grab our attention, if we dwell on them, they will cause us to stray, whether right there in the moment or sometime in the future. Never entertain nor nurture such thoughts that lead away from God's righteousness.

James 1:14-15 reminds us that temptation leads to sin, and sin to death. Falling to temptation leads to compromising ourselves which is followed by feelings of guilt, shame, insecurity, fear and regret. The Lord puts us on notice that sin is crouching at the door. In this age, it is waiting for just the right

**Keeping
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Joy of the Lord

moment to dominate us. 1 Peter 5:8-9 (BSV) urges us to be alert and resist the devil, who seeks to devour us. We are called to stand firm, by being strong in our faith, “knowing that our brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering...”

Such reminders point out that we are not alone in our resistance against temptation and sin. Furthermore, it unites us as a community to encourage and strengthen one other in rebuking Satan in his attempt to have us stumble and sin against the God we profess to love and obey.

James 4:7-8 (ESV) instructs us to submit to God, and He will draw near to us. In submitting ourselves to God and resisting the devil, just as the Lord urged Cain, we have God's promise of victory over the devil: “He will flee from you.” The more we resist, by faith in Christ, the stronger God makes us and the easier it becomes to overcome.

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance/steadfastness. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4 NIV)

There is a conflict within all of us that can rob us of our joy in the Lord. We must keep our minds and our bodies strong in the Lord. Beware of the temptation to substitute faith with the deceitful things of this world. We must be careful not to “back-pedal”, otherwise we will be worse off than before.

Romans 13:11-14 calls us to wake up from spiritual slumber and put on the armour of light. We should behave decently, casting off the deeds of darkness, “not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual

immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Instead, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.” (BSV)

There is a call to endurance, Hebrews 12:1-3 encourages us to throw off sin and endure the race set before us, with our eyes fixed on Jesus, “the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.” (BSV)

When Satan is on the prowl and worldly, fleshly desires start to creep in and try to take a hold of our attention, we should be making diligent effort to focus on good, Godly things. Note the words of encouragement we read in Philippians 4:1-9. Stand firm in the Lord (4:1) and rejoice in Him always (4:4). Present our requests to God in prayer, with thanksgiving (4:6). God's peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (4:7). Dwell on whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy (4:8). Putting these things into practice will bring God's peace into your life (4:9).

We will be filled with joy as we overcome the enemy's constant attempts, “...that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray,” (Revelation 12:9 ESV) whose plan is to cause us to stumble and destroy our joy in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's not allow anything or anyone rob us of our maturing faith. Cherish, above all, a deep and meaningful relationship with God. This results in a pure and undiluted joy of being in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. □

*Carlo Tedesco
Adelaide, South Australia*

Prescriptive or Descriptive?

One of the challenges sincere Bible readers contend with is whether a passage in scripture is either descriptive or prescriptive. In other words, some stories in the Bible describe certain events, ceremonies and circumstances. Other parts of the Bible are considered “prescriptive,” such as obedience to the Ten Commandments, that is, to “live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

A descriptive text in the scripture might be the phrase: “Esau was a hairy man.” It simply describes a feature of a man named Esau. It has no other relevance beyond that. Another descriptive text, limited to circumstances at the time, was Paul's teaching when he wrote that, [my paraphrase] “It is better not to marry.” It is easy to see that these texts do not have any participatory bearing on new covenant followers of Christ today. They simply apply to historical events and peoples.

Alternatively, a prescriptive text might include, “Love your enemies, do good to those who persecute you.” These are instructive words, given by our Lord Jesus Christ. Another set of prescriptive texts are the Ten Commandments. For example,

“Honour your father and mother,” is a direct injunction calling for obedience and transformation.

Of these examples, there is no question as to what is descriptive and what is prescriptive. However, the line between descriptive and prescriptive isn't always as clear as we'd like it. This is because there are grey areas among various theological interpretations within the Christian community on what exactly applies (or doesn't) to the follower of Christ.

The purpose of this short article isn't to coerce one position over the other, as in the following example, but perhaps to prompt us to more closely examine the Biblical narrative, desiring to better understand what our response might look like to the saving grace given us.

Firstly, we know that we are “saved by grace through faith, and not of works,” as apostle Paul so eloquently stated in his letters. We are not saved by our works – that is, the things we do. We are saved by God's grace towards us. However, God's immeasurable grace demands a response, and so our response (or works) reflect the genuineness of our faith. Obedience reflects faith. Prayer reflects faith. We have received the free gift of grace as we

have the free gift of righteousness, and the question which naturally follows is: how do we adequately respond to such “grace upon grace?”

The prescriptive/descriptive conversation is highlighted perhaps most curiously over the subject of the day of Pentecost. This worship assembly first appears in scripture in Exodus 34 and Leviticus 23 as one of the annual sabbaths or appointed times given to the ancient Israelites. It is also regarded as particularly special within the Christian tradition, as Pentecost signifies the beginning of the church era with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Followers of Jesus thus, in various ways, recognise the free gift of the Holy Spirit that came “at the appointed time.”

The question for followers of Jesus is whether this milestone event, as we read of it in the scriptural narrative, is prescriptive or descriptive under the terms of the new covenant? That is, is there any legitimacy in assembling and worshipping God in “spirit and truth” on that annual occasion?

Pentecost essentially means counting fifty days via the lunar calendar from the Sabbath of the wave sheaf offering during the days of

Unleavened Bread just following the Lord's Supper memorial. Thus, the annual appointed time or annual Sabbath of Pentecost falls on a Sunday.

In the first century account of this event, as recorded in Acts chapter two, Jesus' disciples had gathered together in a house. Some theologians see this Sunday assembly as the first time Christians gathered on a Sunday morning for worship and fellowship, thus visibly moving away from their former Hebrew Sabbatarian roots. Other scholars disagree. Instead, they see that this assembly was in response to one of the annual “appointed times of the Lord,” as originally outlined in Leviticus 23 but now lived and experienced under the terms of the new covenant. Apparently, Jesus' first century disciples were simply continuing their pattern of annual worship occasions that included Pentecost.

So, the question that arises here is whether the day of Pentecost as experienced in assembly and worship is prescriptive for Christians or, is it simply historically descriptive of the first century church?

If descriptive only, given that the day is remembered for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, then there's little need to regard the Pentecost event, despite its significance, as anything more than a past historical milestone. If, however, we perceive any prescriptive Biblical compulsion in gathering as Jesus' disciples did on that day, (He commanded them to remain in Jerusalem at that time,) and for which we see the singular, powerful, and dynamic manifestation of Jesus' promise in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on men and women, old and young, Jew and Gentile, we are further compelled to ask: What is my personal response to this? What might this look like under the terms of the new covenant? Is Christian assembly on this day descriptive or prescriptive?

The historical position of the Church of God (Seventh Day) has been that the appointed times of the Lord, or annual Sabbaths, are related only to the tabernacle or temple worship of the ancient Israelites in the context of their delivery from Egypt and their annual barley and wheat harvests, and therefore they have little bearing on Christian liturgy or practice.

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However, we acknowledge with grace, those congregations within our church community who find significant, Christ-centred value in these Biblical markers. Thus, our brothers and sisters among us who do find value in, for example, a Pentecost church service, do so in the spirit that this celebration focusses on the role and work of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, such expressions of assembly and worship should not be a test of fellowship or a requirement for salvation, but valued purely within the spirit of the new covenant as now established in our Lord Jesus Christ.

May we appreciate and in ways appropriate to the work of the Holy Spirit among us, discern with grace those things that are simply descriptive and those that are clearly prescriptive. In doing so, may our conscience, as counselled and compelled by the Spirit, guide our heart and thus our conviction. □

Enas Andras

Remember, Forgetfulness

How can you remember to forget?

Joseph, a man of resilience, walked a traumatic life that ended in glory, honour and being used by God as a saviour of nations. How did Joseph cope and manage through his early life of trauma, betrayal and suffering? Genesis 41:51 recounts, that “Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, ‘It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.’”

Here, “Manasseh” means “to forget,” encapsulating Joseph’s journey from hardship to peace. This account inspired an exploration of forgetfulness – not memory loss but as a divine characteristic. Is forgetfulness a virtue or a vice?

Forgetfulness, when it is unintentional, is a vice leading us away from our duties and the remembrance of God’s goodness. It manifests as missed opportunities to witness, to serve, or to cherish the lessons learned from past experiences and through God’s word.

Forgetfulness becomes a virtue when it is a choice. Psalm 103:12 poetically illustrates this: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

Similarly, Hebrews 8:12 reassures, “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

In these scriptures, God models the divine virtue of forgetting, as an active choice to erase the wrongs. He cleanses our slate and through His mercy, purifies us.

At the crossroads of forgetfulness and forgiveness lies the gateway to peace. To forgive is to choose to forget the pain inflicted by others, freeing ourselves from the chains of past grievances. This liberating act fosters one of the elusive fruits of the spirit: peace. Through this journey, we can achieve peace between ourselves and God as well as achieving peace with others, resulting in communal harmony.

Joseph’s story culminates in a powerful acknowledgment of divine purpose through his trials, ultimately leading to greatness not just for him but for many. Similarly, Revelation 21:4-5 offers a prophetic comfort: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

Here, the divine forgetfulness of past pains heralds the creation of a new, gloriously unmarred reality of a joyous life for eternity.

As we close this reflection on the spirit of forgetfulness, consider this challenge: Identify a hurt that you carry and make a conscious decision to forget. Pray for the strength to forgive, seeking peace and aligning your path with God’s spirit of forgetfulness. May God guide and bless us, as we imbue His glorious virtue of forgetfulness. □

*Omar Afiouni
Sydney, NSW*



STAYING TRUE TO CHRIST IN AN ONLINE WORLD

In our digital age, the theological landscape within Christianity is increasingly complex and varied.

The internet, transcending traditional boundaries, introduces a wide range of ideas into Christian groups, some of which are controversial or even hostile, challenging the faith of many. This new reality underscores the urgent need for responsible teaching and maintaining scriptural integrity, especially in teachings about Jesus Christ.

The influence of digital discourse has led to an erosion of traditional theological boundaries, resulting in a proliferation of teachings that may be controversial or even detrimental to believers' faith. Hebrews 13:9 (NKJV) offers a pertinent warning: "Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines." The risk posed by the digital age is significant, as it exposes believers to unstable and misleading doctrines, particularly those concerning the nature and identity of Christ.

In this landscape of diverse and digital information, the role of Christian teachers

becomes more crucial than ever. James 3:1 (NKJV) underscores this responsibility: "My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgement." Teachers are called to diligently seek scriptural truth, understand foundational doctrines about Christ, and communicate them accurately and responsibly.

Despite the inevitability of differing interpretations, the core truth about Jesus Christ must remain steadfast. Ephesians 4:14-15 (NKJV) encourages believers to grow in faith and knowledge, highlighting the need to discern truth from falsehood and adhere to the central truths of the Gospel: "that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ."

A subtler yet significant danger facing believers today is the rise of theories that, while seemingly grounded in Scripture, are structured in such a way as to lead to overall error. These misleading interpretations use scriptural proofs but are crafted to support preconceived notions or

agendas. Proverbs 14:1 (NKJV) reflects a parallel idea: “The wise woman builds her house, but the foolish pulls it down with her hands.” In the context of our faith, we must be cautious not to deconstruct or destabilise our own foundation in Christ through misguided teachings or interpretations.

2 Peter 1:16 (NKJV) cautions against falling for “cunningly devised fables”, warning against teachings that distort the truth. Furthermore, 2 Peter 3:16 notes the risk of interpreting biblical passages to align with personal biases or misleading doctrines. These deceptive teachings, cloaked in biblical language and references, often selectively use Scripture, taking verses out of context or ignoring the broader narrative of the Bible.

Christian teachers and believers alike must approach Scripture with a desire for truth, free from personal agendas. This involves a comprehensive understanding of biblical teachings, considering the context, historical background, and the overall message of the Gospel. By doing so, we guard against being swayed by theories that lead us away from the core truths of our faith.

Steering biblical discussions and teachings away from affirming the divinity of Christ poses significant risks, as this shift can profoundly impact believers’ understanding of salvation and their Christian life. When the fundamental doctrine of Christ’s divinity is questioned, it often leads to further doubts and reinterpretations of core Christian beliefs. This phenomenon resembles a form of postmodern deconstruct-ionism, where established truths are dismantled under the guise of seeking deeper understanding.

Christ is described as the cornerstone, the solid rock upon which our faith is built. This is powerfully illustrated in Matthew 7:24-27 (NKJV), where Jesus speaks of the wise man building his house on the rock, symbolising the steadfastness of faith rooted in the true nature of Christ, in contrast to the instability of faith built on shifting doctrines and human interpretations, like a house built on sand.

Questioning and personal study are essential for growing in faith and understanding. However, there is a critical distinction between seeking understanding for oneself and following those driven by personal agendas. The danger lies in being led astray by teachings that undermine the core tenets of our faith, particularly the divinity of Christ.

In navigating these theological discussions, it is vital to remain anchored to the foundational truths of Christianity as revealed in Scripture and affirmed through centuries of Christian experience.

While exploration and questioning are part of a healthy faith journey, they should lead us closer to the truth as revealed in Jesus Christ. Our commitment should be to Christ, the unchangeable rock, ensuring that our faith remains solid, resilient, and true to the Gospel we profess to believe. □

*Susan Heming
Newcastle, NSW*



From Sydney: Congratulations on the recent baptism of Bill Clancy. Bill was baptised at Parramatta Lake on a rainy Friday afternoon, on 3 May 2024, and is pictured here with Pastor John. The hosts of heaven rejoice as the seeds of Christ’s Kingdom bear Godly fruit!

Foolishness

AND HOW TO AVOID IT

Foolishness is mentioned by Jesus as one of the things that comes out of the heart and defiles us. (see Mark 7:21-23)

What exactly is foolishness? How can we recognise it, so as to avoid it? There are many ways of being foolish – the path is broad.

In brief, a failure to acknowledge God, and keep His knowledge in our thinking leads to folly – “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom”. True wisdom is the opposite of foolishness. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, but living in this world we have to understand how the world works to “be wise as serpents and harmless as doves”. The primary driver of folly is pride and selfish desire, but there is another cause, laziness. The foolish either have no motivation or the wrong motivations.

A characteristic of the foolish is that they often think they are smart. The lazy can think themselves wise – Proverbs 26:16 “The lazy man is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can answer sensibly.”

Our own wisdom can lead us to the other extreme: “Do not overwork to be rich; Because of your own understanding, cease! Will you set your eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; They fly away like an eagle toward heaven.” (Proverbs 23:4-5 NKJV)

Regarding money and finances, as well as being lazy or overworking, we can be foolish with what we have, by gambling recklessly in the hope of big gains, or be too fearful to invest and take risks. The foolish do not like to take advice, and if they do, it is generally only listened to if it fits their thinking, and so ends up re-enforcing their folly.

Paul advises, “don't be unwise (foolish), but understanding what the will of the Lord is” and to think carefully about what we're doing and how we're living. (Ephesians 5: 15-17). To stray from God's will is foolish; to add to it is also folly.

One overriding characteristic of fools is selfishness. There are many examples in the Bible. Nabal, whose name means “fool” in Hebrew, refused to give David what he was entitled to, and provoked the future king of Israel into almost committing a greater folly. God rescued him through Abigail. David heeded her good advice. David's son, Amnon, had a selfish infatuation with his half-sister, Tamar. He listened to the foolish advice of his crafty friend, something he wanted to hear. It led to misery. (1 Samuel 25; 2 Samuel 13)

We are told to acknowledge God in our ways and to ask for wisdom as we need it, and it will be given us (Matthew 7:7-11, James 1:5-6). To be wise and not foolish, one has to get to know God, understand how He thinks and what He expects of us in this temporary, corrupted, physical world. His wisdom and love necessitated the death of His Son. If we recognise and acknowledge our absolute need for that, and that our old self with its motivations have to die, we can be empowered to depart from folly to a life of true wisdom. A wise son makes a glad Father. He desires us all to be wise and not fools.

God has chosen those considered foolish by the world to confound those thought of as wise (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). He has chosen those who have lived foolishly to become truly wise (Titus 3:3), primarily in God's eyes. This God-given wisdom will also be noticed by men, as the faithful shine as lights in a darkened, foolish world. □

*Michael Evans
Tapitallee, NSW*



The Church of God (Seventh Day) in Australia convened in Mundaring, Western Australia, for the convention on 20-23 March 2024. Attended by delegates from across the country, the theme of the conference was "Today, and that Day." The event was noted for its love, quality of services, seminars and activities including a business session. Group photo taken following the final worship service on Sabbath just prior to a fellowship luncheon.

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