

## Culture and the Bible

By Ronald L. Dart

I wonder how far the Bible has penetrated the world by now. The Gideons have translated the Bible into every significant language of man and many languages that aren't very significant.

Henry Van Dyke said: "Born in the East and clothed in Oriental form and imagery, the Bible walks the ways of all the world with familiar feet and enters land after land to find its own everywhere. It has learned to speak in hundreds of languages to the hearts of man. Children listen to its stories with wonder and delight, and wise men ponder them as parables of life."

It is fascinating how the Bible speaks to men, women and children of every generation and every land. There has to be much of the Bible that makes no sense to people of China, Mongolia, Tanzania, or India. But the core, the message about God and his purpose is there.

I have always been fascinated by the attempts of artists to portray the Bible. Modern man doesn't appreciate the importance of religious art, because a great deal of it was created at a time and place where a majority of the churches were illiterate. They were trying to give the people a sense of the reality of the Bible. There was much they didn't know, and the art is often factually in error, but it was the best they could do.

In the Middle Ages, some artists portrayed Christ and the Apostles wearing medieval garb in an attempt to make them relevant. What they succeeded in doing was making them irrelevant for succeeding generations. I suppose a Chinese artist might paint them in Mandarin garb, an Alaskan Inuit in furs. An American in the 50s might paint them in jackets and ties, in the 90s in business casual. In the 60s he might have painted them much as the traditional Last Supper—robes, sandals and long hair.

In a sense, painters are doing a cultural translation, much as scholars do a language translation. What is not well understood by some is that cultural translation is necessary and legitimate.

The Bible is written from several cultures because of the generational and political differences:

- The earliest culture is probably represented by Job
- The Wilderness culture is shown in the five Books of Moses
- The culture of the Conquest by Joshua
- The culture of Settlement by Judges
- The culture of Kingdom, early and late, by Samuel, Chronicles and Kings
- The culture of Decadence by the Prophets
- The culture of the Exile by Ezekiel
- The Post-Exilic culture by Ezra, Nehemiah and the late Minor Prophets
- The culture of Second Temple Judaism by the four Gospels, James, and Acts
- The culture of the Gentile Churches by Paul

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### ***New Start in the New Year. . .***

We'll have a new president soon. Hopefully, the things he will do will help the economy. We pray that you will benefit from the things he does as well. Speaking from experience, beginning to tithe is the greatest financial insurance you can have. Test God and see if he will pour out a blessing beyond your wildest dreams. God promises to do this after you have brought all the tithes into his storehouse. That God may richly bless you for your obedience is our prayer.

# Christian Bullying – Part 2

By David Havir III

In the last edition of this newsletter, I promised to continue my thoughts on “Christian” bullying. As a refresher, never forget that bullying is about control. The bully wants to control you and everyone else. One way to combat this is to be knowledgeable and on the lookout for those who might try to control you. There are many types of bullies, but three are prevalent.

The Spiritualizer—“If you don’t serve, you aren’t righteous enough.” This is probably the most popular variety. We all agree that we should serve! The counter to this is that we aren’t serving to prove our righteousness. We are serving because there is a need and God instructs us to.

The Patronizer—“Are you sure God is telling you to do this?” This is similar to the Spiritualizer. However, this one is more mocking. It is more about questioning your connection to God.

The Score Keeper—“I helped you out before; now it is your turn to help me.” Always be wary of those who make offers with strings attached.

What is the motivation for these bullies? I read an article about what makes a good villain on the big screen. The most compelling villains believe they are justified in their actions. I believe this is the case here. Let’s discuss three common attitudes of bullies.

The Martyr—“I’m just filling a vacuum; if I don’t take a leadership position, no one else will.” This one cuts a little close to the bone. I may have come close to uttering these lines once or twice in the past. This is not to say that people shouldn’t take charge and take up leadership positions, but it does remind us that when we do, we need to make sure our motivation is pure.

The Fixer—“I’m just fixing what’s wrong; I am keeping the church on course.” The question with this

one is, whose course? Just because you feel that something is most efficient or the best course of action does not mean that it is what is best for the church.

The Stealth Agnostic/Atheist—“God has left us to our own devices.” I had not thought about it from this perspective before. Looking at it now, I realize I have witnessed this in the past.

Are there early warning signs that someone is going to be a bully? The caveat is that none of these necessarily prove that someone is a bully, but these signs tend to be present: the person is a terrible listener; the person likes to murmur and gossip; the person is one of the first in the church to tell you how much they love you.

That last one got my attention. When you think about it, this is a very effective tool for manipulation. False flattery and admiration can cause us to let our guard down, making it easier for the bully to manipulate us in the future. The key is to analyze their ideas on the merits... not just because they told you they love you.

How do you handle a bully? There are three biblical principles that come to mind. First, have courage. Proverbs 31:8-9 says, “Open your mouth for the speechless, In the cause of all who are appointed to die. Open your mouth, judge righteously, And plead the cause of the needy.” Isaiah 1:17 states, “Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.” Second, hold the bully accountable. Christ is the best example of this in John 8. Obviously, we won’t be quite as good at it as he was. But the concept is sound. Third, talk with the bully. If the bully won’t listen, take it to the church (Matthew 18). This is hardly a comprehensive discussion on the topic. But that was never the point. The point is to get everyone thinking... to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves!

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## *In Memory*

Christian Educational Ministries gratefully acknowledges a generous donation made in memory of Phillip Lee Green, the son of Andy and Joyce Green. Lee is survived not only by his parents, Andy and Joyce Green, but by his three children, Phillip Lee Green, Jr., Brandon Kyle Green, and Lauren Elizabeth Green. He was preceded in death by his sister Terri Gale Green. Lee started his own company in Fort Worth, Texas, manufacturing pultrusion equipment. This equipment was sold all over the world and his modern materials manufacturing equipment set the standard for the composites industry. Our prayers are with Andy and Joyce and his children. Lee will be greatly missed.

## Editorial from the November 2016 *Sabbath Sentinel*

By Dr. Royce Mitchell

There exists within the Christian community certain groups of individuals who think they do God a service by attacking other Christians and their differing beliefs. Not only does the Sabbath-keeping community of believers attack others who believe 99% or more the same thing, something that should never be, but also attacks on the Sabbath-keeping community are coming from the outside.

Our brother Calvin Burrell, in his editorial in this edition, rightly points out that we who accept and obey nine of the Ten Commandments of God should find ways to work together to spread the Good News of the coming Kingdom of God instead of dwelling on the very small doctrinal differences that we have—allowing, instead, God the room to correct error as HE sees fit.

However, with all due respect to the opinion of Brother Burrell, there are some who believe that they alone have the truth. They go out of their way to interfere with the efforts of others, whose beliefs differ from theirs, to preach the Gospel and make converts to Christ. One such individual who works against other Christian groups is a man named James Kieferdorf (“JK” hereafter) of Dallas, Texas.

JK seems to work in tandem with a “Dr.” Robert L. Sumner of “The Biblical Evangelist.” He has also published his materials via “Media Ministries Outreach” which is currently under the direction of Richard and Cheryl Schatz. At times he has written under the pseudonym “rushtyping.” Whatever the forum or name, the purpose seems to always be the same—attack those with beliefs he does not consider to “at least meet the basic criteria of orthodoxy,” as defined by JK, Sumner, and others in their small band.

The main thrust of JK’s “ministry” is to attack any Church that teaches that the Bible does not teach the existence of the “Holy Trinity” as defined by them to be the existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit combined as a triune God. These attacks never come with proof of the existence of the “Holy Trinity.” Instead, the truth of that dogma is assumed by JK in all of his writings to the various media outlets, upon which platform he then presumes to relegate organizations who teach differently to the realm of heretics.

There are numerous instances shown via internet

searches of JK’s name that he both writes, and encourages others to write, to media complaining about the teaching of heresy by various Church of God groups, including Christian Educational Ministries, the United Church of God, Church of God International and pretty much any other of the Sabbath-keeping groups that have come into existence since the death of Herbert W. Armstrong.

One such website to which the reader can turn for information on JK is: [http://mmoutreachinc.com/cult\\_groups/kieferdorf.html](http://mmoutreachinc.com/cult_groups/kieferdorf.html). JK’s venomous attacks on the various groups is undisguised. JK does not get some of the doctrines to which he takes exception properly stated, which gives rise to the probability that he doesn’t understand what those groups teach.

More of JK’s incessant ranting against certain Sabbatarian organizations can be found as recently as last year on Sumner’s website: <http://www.biblicalevangelist.org/index.php?id=517&view=Guest+Editorial>.

As usual, the thrust of JK’s actions is to bombard, and encourage others to bombard, media outlets that televise or broadcast the evangelistic programs of many of the Churches of God with letters demanding the shutting down of their programs. In the above recent article, “Dr.” Sumner lauds JK for taking action to contact many television outlets and “doing a tremendous job telephoning and writing these stations at his own expense, giving documentation of their heresies, and very kindly begging them to take these heretics off their stations.” Sumner then goes on to list many of the Church of God groups stating this, “Although there are some details in these Armstrong groups’ teachings that differ from the old Herbert and Garner Ted Armstrong doctrines, these new cults and others hold to the primary ones, such as a denial of the eternal Sonship of Christ, the denial of the full deity of Jesus Christ (i.e., The Living Church of God, The Church of God Internationally affiliated associates, Wade Cox’s Christian Churches of God, and Anthony Buzzard’s Restoration Fellowship).”

The problem with JK, Sumner and those of his ilk are that they have set themselves up as arbiters of what passes for “the Faith once delivered.” A doctrine that is not in accordance with their beliefs is, by their standard, heresy, and worthy of their concerted action to silence the truth as understood by the various Churches of God.

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Admittedly, those Churches of God have brought some of the venom on themselves. They've done this by calling teachings of mainstream Christianity "damnable lies." These types of statements should not be among those used by Christians. As I stated in a previous editorial, there is not a one among us who has not learned that they were in error on some point of doctrine in the past. The truth in that statement is that, if we were doctrinally wrong before, then we can be just as wrong today. JK and those like him are just another set of self-proclaimed Christians who don't understand that truth.

An interesting point related to JK, Sumner, and others is that the largest Sabbath-keeping organizations, such as Seventh Day Adventists, Church of God Seventh Day, and Seventh Day Baptists, seem to have escaped their notice. Most likely this is because their evangelistic efforts are primarily done through the print media, local evangelistic campaigns, and with direct face-to-face teaching about the Gospel.

There are several Scriptures that come to mind that are relevant to this situation. The first is in Mark 9:38-42: "And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part. For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward. And whosoever shall offend

one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea" (KJV).

The context is found just after Jesus had admonished the disciples to receive little children. The point here is that there were people doing a work for God who did not follow the Jesus the disciples followed and Jesus told them to leave those people alone because they were on the same side.

There is another relevant Scripture found in Acts 5:38-39: "And now I say to you, Withdraw from these men and let them alone. For if this counsel or this work is of men, it will come to nothing. But if it is of God, you cannot overthrow it, lest perhaps you be found even to fight against God." Gamaliel, the teacher of Saul who became the Apostle Paul, wisely instructed the leaders in the Sanhedrin to leave Peter and the Apostles alone. Why? Because they could not know for certain that they would not be working against God.

In this case, JK and his band are ignoring the plain admonition of Scriptures to leave those who are preaching Christ alone because they are preaching Christ and it isn't known who has the exact truth.

What should we do, then? Two things come to mind. First, pray for these misguided men who have not learned some of the simplest things of Scripture. Second, where we find these media broadcasts and telecasts, write to the stations carrying them and thank them for allowing the good news of Christ's Kingdom to be preached through them.

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## A Widow's Perspective

By Karen Buchkowski

As a body of believers we have been inundated with a virtual torrent of opinions in regard to various aspects of our belief system—what it ought to include and how it ought to be practiced. James 1:19-27 seems to give a pretty succinct description of the essentials of our religious profession. The Expositor's Bible Commentary states that, "Verses 26-27 point out three specific areas where truth should be put into practice." The topic of this piece will be limited to the first portion of verse 27, "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble" (NKJV).

First, what is the "trouble" that the widows and orphans face? Losses of this magnitude inflict indescribable emotional pain, feelings of abandonment, anxiety, anger, panic, doubt about God's love and mercy, loneliness, disorganization, and depression. In addition, a number of major life changes occur, including absence of a major nurturing element in the family, alteration of social status, change of economic status, isolation from former couple friends, not to mention a possible change of employment or move. If you've ever tried to imagine

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If we were going to try to *imitate* Bible culture, which of these would we choose? None of them. The Bible can be applied in any culture of any age—Chinese, African, or European. It is not the culture of the Bible we follow, but Christ, the Father, and it is their instructions that we heed.

But the *applications* of these instructions are profoundly influenced by the culture of the time and place. Intuitively we know this, but we have a hard time articulating why it is so and how it should work. As a result, literalists have a field day with the Law. When they hit you with a proof text, that is that—they don't want to hear about culture and nuances of tradition. If the Bible says it, that's the way it is. I would suggest you nod and say, "That's very interesting," and go your way.

So, let's see if we can grapple with some examples of this. First, let's get something clear. The Law of God is the truth and the truth doesn't change. Our doctrines are the platform from which we view the truth and the Law. Oftentimes, when defending our platform, we get confused and think we are defending the truth. But the fact is, we have had to change our platform before and we will likely have to do it again. But our changes had nothing to do with the truth or the Law, only our understanding and application of them.

Now, is it possible that the *application* of God's Law can change with cultural changes? I think it is, but you will have to bear with me through an example.

"And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made *them* at the beginning made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?' So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matthew 19:4-6).

Compare: "When a man hath taken a wife, and married her, and it come to pass that she find no favour in his eyes, because he hath found some uncleanness in her: then let him write her a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife" (Deuteronomy 24:2).

Note well, Jesus did not do away with the original intent, he just allowed an adaptation to a sinful culture and he accepted the Mosaic application.

I think the concept of the application of the Law may help us understand a little better the confusion that has clouded this issue for a long time.

Visualize holding the Law of God in your left hand and Israel in your right hand. What we call the Old Covenant described the relationship between God and Israel, and the application of the Law to them as a community.

Now visualize the Law in your left hand and the church in your right hand. The New Covenant describes the relationship between God and the church and the application of the Law to the church—and ultimately the application of the Law to Israel as well. "For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Hebrews 8:8-10). Note: the Law moves from the hand to the heart. It is not the Law that changes, but the relationships and applications.

It is useful to study the culture of these times as far as we can, because it sheds light on the intent and purpose of God. There is no merit in imitating the culture for its own sake. The culture is not the Law of God, but a response to the Law of God.

How should the Law of God be applied in your church? There are two standards of proof in court:

- In criminal cases, beyond a reasonable doubt
- In civil cases, on the balance of the evidence

Your church will have some doctrines it believes it has proved beyond a reasonable doubt, like the Sabbath, holy day observance, and a few others. Church discipline, then, will require adherence to and belief in these doctrines in order to serve, although they should never be a barrier to attendance.

Your church will have other doctrines that it decides on the balance of the evidence, such as which calendar to use. This will mean that if they use the Hebrew calendar, like 95% of the churches we know, then that is when the church will meet.

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Those who don't see it that way are welcome and may be otherwise fully involved in the work of the local church, but the decision of the church is binding upon the church. Even so, it should not be a mandatory belief. So what am I saying—that culture controls? Hardly. The Law of God controls. But culture may influence the application of the Law.

So, is there any value in studying the culture of the past—that of Moses, Israel, Judaism, Paul? Absolutely, because from understanding the culture, we may better understand what was written, because it was written to that culture. But our objective is not the imitation of the

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yourself widowed or fatherless, realize the reality is a thousand times worse. It takes more time to work through all these things than you might think—and mental and physical exhaustion often result. In ignorance, many, even family and friends, may retreat once the funeral flowers have faded.

Why do we appreciate your visits? We have lost among the closest of all human relationships, a husband and a father. We yearn for genuine, caring, compassionate relationships, even long distance ones if necessary. Children require more than a single mother's perspective as their own view of life develops. In addition, the scattering of brethren increases our isolation. Whose group will we gravitate toward? Very likely the ones who reach out to us in concrete ways. A polite invitation to church just doesn't cut it. Your words and actions may affect our view of God, and of you as a practicing Christian.

What can you do? Most of the time, a non-judgmental, listening ear will suffice. Emotional turmoil is normal. If you think we are not exercising enough faith in our trial, take into consideration that your comforting example may play a role in restoring us. Don't be afraid to stop by for an occasional chat while in town, or drop us a brief note from time to time. When appropriate, we would appreciate being included in social activities, and not as an afterthought. While we don't wish to be a burden to anyone, occasionally we could use a helping hand with those chores that require more strength and expertise than we can muster alone—hired handymen aren't always readily available. Most of us are able

culture, but the imitation of Christ. And Christ is relevant to every generation.

The Law of God is not simple. It is highly complex. But like many complex things, it is composed of a number of principles, each one simple in itself.

Why is there not more explanation in the Law of all variables we may encounter? Because life is too complex—no library could ever hold the books. The Law is given to us to study so that we might gain understanding of life and God.

You will want to hear the rest of this story, so return the enclosed card, call us at 1-888-BIBLE-44, or email us at [adm@borntowin.net](mailto:adm@borntowin.net) and request your copy of *The Law Applied* by Ronald L. Dart.

learners and will tackle the job ourselves next time, given a little instruction. Over the years some have been great surrogate dads when the occasion arose, teaching a teen to drive—stick shift, no less, running rapids in a canoe, helping put up a tent, acting as confidant, to name a few. We have suffered a major blow to our self respect—while a part of our unit has been extracted, we don't respond well to being patronized, or to having someone take over the tasks we are capable of performing ourselves. If you're not sure, just ask. If we're not able to tell you, be observant. By all means, if you offer, follow through, as trust is a major part of our restoration process.

What can the widow do? We have to make our needs and desires known in order for them to be met. Also, taking initiative in relationship building may be necessary. Prayer and Bible study are essential. Challenging ourselves to reinvest in new areas of fulfillment is helpful. Having suffered deeply, we can use the experience to encourage others (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Service plays a major role in our healing, but we also require our own emotional cups to be refilled often. If others don't notice your empty cup, call their attention to it. Hopefully, this article will give us all a nudge in the right direction.

## Born to Win

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*That the man of God may be proficient and equipped for every good work.*