

SHIELD OF FAITH MISSION INTERNATIONAL

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Fulfilling the Great Commission Through Establishing New Testament Churches



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• P.O. Box 144 • Bend, OR 97709 • (541) 382-7081 • Email sfmi@sfmiusa.org • fax (541) 382-4471 •

Trends: Confirming the Word



By Dick York

Following is an article that appeared in this space ten years ago. We are submitting it again because it is apropos to the continuing trends and the escalating advance into the “last days conditions” increasingly evident on every side but more widely ignored than ever by multitudes of professing Christians.

With an unknown quantity now the Head of State in our nation and the wild approbation for him on display among peoples around the world that despise our values, one is forced to wonder exactly how far along we are in the course of future history foretold in scripture. Perhaps we are experiencing the future we thought was still ahead of us. Time will tell.

The World Is Trendy

The world is trendy. In our society we witness one fad following another year after year, generation after generation. Some of them are harmless changes that reflect nothing more than a desire for variety. Some, however, reflect the constant struggle of mankind to free himself of the moral bonds that God’s law has placed upon him.

“Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder and cast away their cords from us.”¹

Each Trend Moves the World Closer to Godlessness

The mindset described in Psalm 2 has governed man’s actions since time immemorial, but in these last days we can expect it to increase as mankind sees what he considers a light at the end of the tunnel. As we cast away the restraining mores that have kept sand sprinkled on the slippery slope, the slide to Christlessness will accelerate as has been foretold in the Word of God. What the world views as freedom from God will bring celebration to the wicked and increasing challenge to the righteous.

The Religious Church Is Also Trendy

Some in the church tend to be trendy also,

passing from one spiritual climate to another, from one prevailing doctrine to the next, in a perpetual evolution very unlike “Jesus Christ, [who is] the same yesterday, today and forever.”

Each Trend Moves Us Closer to the World’s Position

The trends seem to affect most denominations, blurring their distinctives. With every wave that passes through, a greater homogeneity becomes apparent. If this were a matter of believers becoming more alike as they become more like Jesus, it would be an encouraging trend. (In some cases no doubt that is happening.) But even casual observation reveals that the changes are moving many evangelicals closer to the world’s religiosity. The movements of the church and those of the world are merging.

Old Time Preachers Taught

I have many fond memories, as a young believer in the early fifties, of listening to fine Bible expositors as they taught through the Revelation and the other New Testament books. I was instructed, fed, and blessed by the teachings on biblical separation from the world according to 2 Corinthians 6 and all the supporting scriptures from the Old and New Testaments. They warned of the future apostatizing of the professing church and pointed to Rome as the city of Revelation 17.

They agreed with one another as they taught of the progression of sin from Romans 1, 2 Timothy 3:13 and 2 Timothy 4:3,4, warning us that the time would come when professing believers would not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts would heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and would turn away their ears from the truth and be turned unto fables.

It seemed incredible that it could happen since the doctrines of the Word were so clear and the warnings so unmistakable. I could hardly believe that some day homosexuality would be an accepted lifestyle and society would be afflicted with a reprobate mind. It seemed impossible that in spite of the clarity of the warnings, some believers would one day embrace ecumenicalism, Rome and the

world system. I am describing the common evangelical position of merely forty-five years ago.

It was clear to those men of God that there would be a great falling away as the scriptures teach us in 2 Thessalonians 2:2. They taught that as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the coming of the son of man. In the days of Noah violence filled the earth. Many of those old men who proclaimed God's Word forty-five years ago would, if they were alive today, be astounded at the level of violence in our cities now.

What they taught was true. However, I never imagined I would live to see it all coming to pass. But it seems I may live to see the rest of it as well. They taught that Jesus would return with his raptured saints to end an anti-Christ government that would rule over the earth and set up his earthly kingdom for a thousand years.

Three Things Are Clear In God's Word

There will be a great falling away.² *Jesus told us very clearly that in the last days false prophets would come preaching a deception so subtle that even the very elect would be deceived if that were possible. Paul concurred in 2 Thessalonians 2. Peter also confirmed it in his second epistle, as did John in his epistles and in the Revelation. They agreed also that there will be an anti-Christ, one world government and that Jesus himself shall return to the earth to establish his righteous kingdom.*

As these things unfold exactly according to the Word of God, proving the truth of the old doctrines, more and more people cease to believe them.

There Is a Minority And a Majority View

When thousands gather in Portland, Oregon's new Rose Garden to watch the Trail Blazers play NBA basketball this winter, there will be a majority and a minority. The majority will be thousands of cheering spectators; the minority, the players. There will also be another minority on the court—the officials. They will study their rule book, watch for fouls and infractions, and when they occur, blow their whistles. They will govern the game according to the rules whether the majority likes it or not. They only play the game differently if the rule book changes. Their authority is in the book.

The enthusiasm of the spectators is fueled by the astounding athletic ability of the players. If the officials were not there or if they failed to apply the

book, soon thousands of spectators would be cheering enthusiastically for actions contrary to the rules.

The Minority Plays by the Book

In the case of the church and its mission, the rule book is the Word of God. Since the Word never changes, it would seem the church should not change. The message should be constant and likewise the mission. Whatever changed over the past forty-five years made way for what seems to be a majority shift in the church. Like in the history of the kings of the Old Testament, when leaders changed, a minority shifted from the word of the prophets; and the nation soon followed. Ignoring the rule book causes the game to be played differently, and soon the spectators are caught up in the excitement of a whole new sport.

In the days of Noah when the majority was corrupted, violence soon filled the earth. However, a minority held the line. Noah and his family did

not change their message or their relationship to the world and its religions in one hundred and twenty years, despite the obvious temptations or pressures. As a result they preserved the lineage of the redeemer and of the redeemed.

Merging of Religions and Nations

Two happenings underscore the conditions on the present world scene: the Million-Man March on Washington; and the plight of Army Specialist Michael New of Conroe, Texas.

The Million-Man March illustrated perfectly the flowing together of the masses—Christian and non-Christian alike. Opening with a prayer in Arabic to Allah and closing the same way, in between the event was filled with nominally Christian "Reverends" preaching their "gospel" with all kinds of convoluted misapplications and misinterpretations of such scriptures as "Ye must be born again" and "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...." The closing included "To God Be the Glory," a song featuring the sacrifice of the saving blood of Jesus at Calvary.

Perhaps not many evangelical believers would be confused by all that, but we can be pretty sure that some professing Christians among those 400,000 attendees were convinced that Jesus, the god "Aton," Jehovah, and Allah are somehow related. But while most evangelicals may not be confused by what happened there, it is not too different from what is

These are exciting days as we see the accelerating fulfillment of God's Word in our age. It is all coming together as God warned us it would.

happening in the alliances that are taking place in the “Christian” world as the Pope holds his ecumenical councils with every world religion in his ambitious vision to unite all religions under one banner.

On the national side, at least one U.S. soldier has come in conflict with the placing of U.S. troops under foreign command contrary to the U.S. Constitution. He is facing probable court martial for refusing to wear the UN insignia or take the UN oath, which requires a pledge to “...discharge those functions and regulate my conduct with the interests of the United Nations only in view....”

Forty-five years ago as I listened to those solid old teachers of God’s Word, I never had the faintest idea I would have lived to see this much progress toward one world religion and one world government. But here it is.

While the masses, both Christian and worldly are gradually merging on the broad way there are still a large minority who, with Bible in hand and heart, are shining its light on the sign-post at the crossroads that says, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” It is pointing to the old-fashion, narrow way.

The Word of God has not changed. But not all the players are playing by the book any more. The message is changing, and many are swayed by excitement, encouragement, prestige and money.

To further homogenize the message, many good third-world evangelists are offered airfares and unthinkable opportunities to travel to exciting places to participate in unimaginable conventions where

they will learn some good things about evangelism, experience camaraderie with a stimulating mass of others like themselves, and the exposed conformity to the new philosophy of ecumenical teamwork. Some lose their spiritual discernment and their view of biblical separation. Some don’t. But those who do are automatic recruits for the message of homogeny.

These are exciting days as we see the accelerating fulfillment of God’s Word in our age. It is all coming together as God warned us it would. But in all of it we take comfort and courage in that God’s sheep hear his voice and they follow him. They will not follow the voice of strangers. Therefore, it is our purpose to simply continue to proclaim the old-fashioned gospel at home and abroad as we look eagerly but patiently for the coming of the Lord Jesus to claim his bride, to judge the rebellious world, and to establish his own kingdom. Allelujah!

Additional comment: The forty-five years mentioned in the above article has now become fifty-five years, and we have moved on. Violence has increased; globalism has become more evident economically, politically and militarily. The American mentality has taken a huge swing to the left, and the people have been made willing to commit themselves slavishly to any form of “change” that may be dished up to them. This is not a political problem, but a spiritual one. It is fitting that true believers

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Meet the Board:

From Religion to Life: The Testimony of Steve Montgomery

Growing up in a church-attending family, I was in church from the nursery roll. Our family never questioned attendance to church. It was what decent families did on Sunday. However, the protestant church we attended had no clear message of conversion, and I never understood anything about the Good News of Jesus Christ. I recall sitting in the church service one Sunday. I had become bored with the message being preached—I didn’t really understand what was being said and was looking around the spacious, ornate sanctuary. My eyes came to rest on a lighted cross in front of the pulpit, and I remember suddenly reflecting, “How strange that Christianity



would use as a Christian symbol the cross, considering that Jesus died on a cross! I would think we Christians would hate the cross that killed Jesus!” So little did I understand of the message of the Bible!

In junior high I was leader of the church youth group; but by high school, church had so little to do with my real life that, somehow, without a conscious decision, I drifted away from church attendance.

It was the turbulent time of the Sixties with drugs, rock-and-roll and war protests; and my life followed that same turbulent path. Out of high school, I moved into a house with several other hippie friends and immersed myself in a life of parties, music and debauchery. During this time I had

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Does God Have a Mother?

By Jim Lucas

Absolutely not! No, no way. To say that God has a mother is an insult to him—therefore be careful of saying such a thing. There are people who teach that Mary is the mother of God because she gave birth to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In order for Mary to be the mother of God she would have to be an eternal being that existed before God existed, and no one can lay hold to that claim for God alone is eternal. Mary was born of her parents in Israel. She is a created being like you and me. No one can create God. It is God that created all things. Listen carefully to the word of God: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men” (John 1:1-4).

The Word of God is the Son of God who always has been and who left His glorious place with the Father to come to redeem us. It says in John 1:14: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” God is not flesh; God is Spirit. (John 4:24) Mary was a God-fearing virgin that was chosen to be the vessel that the Lord used to come into the world. According to her own words she trusted in God her Savior. Mary was born into this sinful world, and like all of us she was a part of Adam’s family, therefore a sinner, for we “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom.3:23). Mary found grace because she feared God and trusted in Him to save her. Look at Luke 1:46,47: “And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” This God-fearing woman, at the marriage in Cana when they came to her with the problem of having no wine, directed the disciples to go to Jesus and “whatsoever he saith unto you, do it” (John 1:5).

If you have been calling Mary the divine mother of God, you need to repent for this is sin. Mary is not the mother of God nor is she divine. Only God is divine. If you have been praying to Mary, this is also sin. Mary cannot be pleased

with people praying to her because she is a true believer, and true believers will not accept this exaltation. If she were here, she most likely would say, “Go to Jesus and whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.” There is not one place in the Bible where anyone ever prayed to Mary, nor is there the slightest suggestion that we should. We are told to pray to the Father in Jesus’ name and no word about praying to Mary (See John 16:23). “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.” Jesus said, in John 14:6, “I am the way the truth and the life and no man comes to the Father but by me.”

He didn’t say “But by me and my mother.” Because Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, Satan is working to distract us from coming directly to him. Some say that Mary has a softer heart, and that’s why they go to her. However the word of God informs us that “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Mary was blessed by God and is a very good example of a God-fearing woman; nevertheless, it wasn’t Mary who gave her life for us; but it was Jesus Christ the Son of God. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). He didn’t say, “He that believeth in Him and his mother. God’s supernatural love far exceeds any love that Adam’s race could ever have. Beloved don’t believe satan’s lies; no one could ever love you the way our Father has loved you for God is love.

Jesus is the way, the only way to the Father. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1Tim.2:3-5). To God only be the glory, Jesus the Son of God, who created all things, “being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things

in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Ph. 2:9-11). No one on the earth is worthy of such honor; no created being can ever be given honor above the creator. Therefore, let us give preeminence (highest honor) to Jesus alone, like those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him (Jesus) were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” [highest honor] (Col.1:12-18). God bless you. 🙏

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remember that God is still in charge. “*For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another. For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and he poureth out the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked of the earth shall wring them out, and drink them. But I will declare forever; I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. All the horns of the wicked also will I cut off; but the horns of the righteous shall be exalted.*”³

This is not a time for change. It is a time to seek the old paths, and to be steadfast, unmovable, firmly anchored in the unchanging Word of God. 🙏

Endnotes

1 Psalm 2: 1-3

2 2 Thessalonians 2:2

3 Psalm 75: 6-10

Our Cover: Humanity follows trends, however sometimes trivial. The cover photo shows the multitude of people who turned out for the grand opening of a MacDonald’s.

Montgomery Testimony, continued from page 4

some experiences which caused me to realize that there were spiritual things happening around me and began to take a more serious look at Christianity. Finally, convinced that the message of Jesus was true, I sought out a group of Christians who could explain to me how to become a follower of Christ. There, a young man explained to the difference between religion and a personal relationship with Christ. He explained the cross, resolving that enigma of my youth, and invited me to put my trust in Christ for salvation. That night, New Year’s Eve 1969, I believed the Gospel; and Jesus Christ, by His Spirit, took up residence in my spirit. I was born all over again.

Over the years the Lord has done many wonderful things in my life—restoring my relationship with my parents, giving me a wonderful godly wife, calling us to the work of the Gospel in Mexico, giving six wonderful children, and linking us to the team at SFMI—but none can compare to that one glorious moment in which I was “made nigh by the blood of Christ” and am now once and for all “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 2:13, 1:6). 🙏



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On Distinctions and Doctrine

Steve Montgomery



Recently, I was invited to join several other churches in a statewide evangelistic outreach. In deference to the brother that invited me, I attended an organizational meeting. On the organizing board, alongside a Baptist pastor, a Pentecostal pastor and a Charismatic pastor, were two leaders of the Apostolic denomination, a group that denies the Trinity. When I explained I could not participate with a group that denies one of the fundamental doctrines of the faith, some were grieved at my willingness to “divide over non-essentials.”

It was the first time I had heard another believer call the Personhood of God a “non-essential.”

I have, however, seen other doctrines move from essential to non-essential over the years. Believer’s baptism, for example, was considered an important doctrine of the faith only thirty years ago. Today, many hold that not only is the *method* of baptism unimportant, but that baptism *itself* is unimportant. Even those who deny water baptism altogether are considered brethren in good standing.

These fundamentals are being moved from their standing as *doctrines* to *convictions* and finally to *opinions*, thus undermining essential truth. Equal damage is done by exalting opinion and conviction to the level of doctrine, thus putting a yoke on God’s people and giving place to sectarian pride.

God makes distinctions—clean and unclean, holy and profane, light and dark—and we will confuse ourselves and those who hear us if we don’t distinguish things that differ. In this article and the second part in the next issue, I will delineate some of the key differences among doctrine, conviction and opinion by looking at these five basic areas:

- The **AUTHORITY** upon which they are based;
- The **EXTENSION** of their application;
- Their overarching **IMPORTANCE**;
- Their proper **COMMUNICATION**; and
- The way they **DEVELOP** in our lives.

In this article, I will address the first and key area of difference:

AUTHORITY

On what authority are each of these three categories legitimately based?

DOCTRINE

Doctrine—true Christian doctrine - is always based solely and finally upon the Bible. The Bible

is the final authority for the Christian. The Bible is the Word of God, fully true in all it says and fully authoritative in all that it affirms. Obviously the Bible contains declarations which were truly made but which the Bible itself does not affirm. In Genesis 3, for example, the Bible records what Satan really said: “Ye shall be as gods,” but the Bible does not affirm that statement as authoritative. Satan lied. The Bible is true in all it says and authoritative in all it teaches. The single most significant distinguishing mark of a cult is its acceptance of another authority equal to or above the Bible. The single most significant mark of a New Testament church is its loyal submission to the Bible.

Doctrine has two additional characteristics which should be noted: First of all, to be a doctrine of the Scripture, it must be taught in more than a single passage of Scripture. A single mention of something in a single passage does not constitute it a doctrine of Scripture. The principal of a minimum of two witnesses aptly applies here (Jn. 8:17). In fact, the frequency with which a doctrine reappears in Scripture is a measure of its importance. All the key doctrines of Scripture are taught repeatedly in both the Old and New Testaments, in whole chapters or entire books. Do you wish to understand justification by faith? Read the book of Romans! The Church? Ephesians! Law and grace? Galatians! Entire books are dedicated to these key doctrines of Scripture. If a person sets forth a teaching found in only one passage as a doctrine, that person is in error. If a person exalts a teaching found in only two or three passages of Scripture as a key teaching of the Bible, he is giving that doctrine an importance not given to it by God and is in error.

Secondly, to be a doctrine for the church of Jesus Christ, it must be taught principally in the New Testament. It is the word of Christ that is to dwell among and in believers in all wisdom (Col. 3:16). It is the message of grace that builds (Acts 20:32) and establishes (Heb. 13:9). We have been made able ministers of the New Testament (2 Cor. 3:6). “The law was given by Moses,” John tells us in John 1:17, “but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” There is no doubt about the veracity of the Old Testament, but John affirms that the truth of the New Testament so outstrips that of the Old that it can be said that

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From the President's Desk

“Not far from where we live in Switzerland is a high ridge of rock with a valley on both sides. One time I was there when there was snow on the ground along that ridge. The snow was lying there unbroken, a seeming unity. However, that unity was an illusion, for it lay along a great divide; it lay along a watershed. One portion of the snow when it melted would flow into one valley. The snow which lay close beside would flow into another valley when it melted.

Now it just so happens on that particular ridge that the melting snow which flows down one side of that ridge goes down into a valley, into a small river, and then down into the Rhine River. The Rhine then flows on through Germany and the water ends up in the cold waters of the North Sea. The water from the snow that started out so close along that watershed on the other side of the ridge, when this snow melts, drops off sharply down the ridge into the Rhone Valley. This water flows into Lac Leman — or as it is known in the English-speaking world, Lake Geneva — and then goes down below that into the Rhone River which flows through France and into the warm waters of the Mediterranean.

The snow lies along that watershed, unbroken, as a seeming unity. But when it melts, where it ends in its destinations is literally a thousand miles apart. That is a watershed. That is what a watershed is. A watershed divides. A clear line can be drawn between what seems at first to be the same or at least very close, but in reality ends in very different situations. In a watershed there is a line.” (Francis Schaeffer, The Great Evangelical Disaster).

This issue is, in many ways, a watershed. Not so much for the Update itself, as for the Prayer and News Update's message in the context of events today. As the economy wavers and stumbles toward a New World Economic Order, with political turmoil in India, Pakistan, Thailand, Greece, with a new President in the White House determined to set the Nation on a hitherto unknown course, this issue of the Prayer and News Update turns us to some unchanging, unchangeable truths: The lead

article makes a call to turn from trends to the Word. Another reminds us of the nature of God amidst fables and traditions. Yet another lays out the importance of rightly dividing the Word.

In a time when there are so many voices telling us which way to turn, as Christians let us turn back to the basics: away from trends and toward Christ, away from fables and toward God Himself, away from opinions and to the Word.

Enjoy this issue, but take its exhortations and challenges seriously.

Steve Montgomery



Street preaching during The Great Awakening.

On January 19, 2009 SFMI initiated the **2009 Discipleship Training Program (DTP)**, a six-month training for selected men and women, young people and families. The DTP offers classroom instruction in basic Bible doctrine, with times of evangelism, street preaching, Scripture memorization, and practical service. For those who complete the DTP, believe they are called to serve in another culture and have the approval of their local church, the **Discipleship Training Program** is followed by a three-month **Intensive Missions Preparation**, which will include advanced Bible training, language acquisition, training in practical skills and service in the U.S. and/or abroad. After the Intensive Missions Preparation, trainees will return to their local churches to be commended to the work in the Lord's time. Pray for the trainees and the teachers involved.

If you are interested in future training, write:
Shield of Faith Mission
PO Box 144
Bend OR 97709
or email sfmi@sfmiusa.org
Phone 541 382 7081.



Missionary Reports

Loron/Loma Tribal Report, Africa **Jerry Skiles**

Dear Brethren,

Here is an update of my future activities and prayer requests.

December 3, I will be volunteering in Mali, helping with the Shea nut industry. I will be working in villages that have Peace Corps volunteers. The Peace Corps will encourage and help the nationals as they adapt the recommendations that I offer them. This trip will be supported by USAID. I will be home for Christmas.

Pray for opportunity to share the Gospel with nationals and Peace Corps workers. Pray that my intervention will result in sustainable change in the nationals' ability to meet their needs.

I talked to Hovare on the phone and learned that a wildfire burned the straw roof on the Church in Boba. They will probably rebuild as the fire damaged the mud walls as well. They did save the benches in the building. He said that the fire scorched his trees. I didn't ask if it got into the grain fields. The rains stopped early, and the majority of the grain crop has not matured. Hovare said it will be a tough year for many. He mentioned that there is a new Loma believer. I think that is the first one since we left the area six years ago. I trust the spiritual drought is over for the Loma tribe.


I will try to get Hovare to travel to Mali to see him and discuss how serious the problems are and if anything can be done to help.

January, 2009 I will return to tribe for the annual believers' conference teaching and visiting in the tribal area.

March, 2009 Ed Enns (a missionary friend) and I will be surveying and visiting tribal areas in West Africa and contacting African mission organizations and missionaries. I will share more about this in the future.

Pray for Cherry during the times of separation while I am overseas.

Brisbin our son has joined the Army and will be leaving for boot camp the end of December.

In His love,
Jerry and Cherry Skiles 

News from Ghana, West Africa **Skip and Julie Voetberg and family**

SFMI Update

Religion versus Righteousness.

“Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many shall say to me in that day Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?” (Mt. 7:21-22.). How about you, dear reader, do you fall into this category of religious activity? Are you putting confidence in your religious activities to be your source of salvation? When that day comes for you to stand before the Lord Jesus to have the life that you lived here on this earth judged, will you be trying to convince the Lord of your worthiness for eternal life by religious good works? “Be not high minded but fear.” The Lord calls those who are involved in this sort of religious activity without knowing the Lord Jesus “workers of iniquity” (Matthew 7:23).

On the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2:42, when Peter had finished the preaching of the gospel to the people of Jerusalem, the religious crowd called out to him, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” I will ask you the same question, friend, what will you do when you are face to face with the glory and righteousness of the Lord Jesus? Will you try and impress Him by telling Him of all your religious activities and good deeds as those described in Matthew 7:21?

In Isaiah 1:10-20 the Lord shares with us how He feels about religious activity that comes from an unclean heart. “The calling of assemblies, Sabbaths; even the solemn meeting, it is iniquity.” He says that He hates the feasts and is weary with them. Consider verse 15, “When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you: yea, when you make many prayers, I will not hear your hands are full of blood.” You may be asking, “Isn't God pleased when we are religious?” Let's answer that by taking a quick look at the history of religion.

Genesis chapter three records the account of the falling away of man from the will of God into sin, or the doing of man's will. In verse seven of chapter three, when Adam and Eve's eyes were opened and they saw their nakedness, “they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.” That was their attempt to cover their sin and shame with the works of their hands, their own idea. What were the Lord's thoughts on their attempt of atonement? It appears that the Lord stripped them of their own covering and

in verse twenty-one the Bible says that “the Lord God made coats of skins and clothed them.” The works of man’s hands were not acceptable as a means for forgiveness or as a covering for sin. It had to be a provision from the Lord. That provision was a slain animal, which shed blood and became the substitute sacrifice and covering for their sin. Romans 6:23 reminds us that “the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

In addition, Adam and Eve’s two sons present a picture for us as to the difference between religion and righteousness. Chapter four of Genesis tells of a time when Cain and Abel were to bring an offering to the Lord. Cain was a farmer, so he brought the fruit of the ground. Abel was a shepherd, and he brought a young lamb. In verse four, we see that the Lord had respect for Abel, but Cain’s offering was not accepted. The Lord warned Cain that if he did well he would be accepted, but if he did not do well “sin lieth at the door.”

So what was the problem here? Both men were making an offering to the Lord. Why did the Lord not accept Cain’s offering? One reason is because Cain’s offering was from the works of his hands; it was not a righteous one, a provision from the Lord. Moreover, in this example as well as the example of his parents, the works of his hands provided no shed blood as an offering for his sin (Hebrews 9:22).

With these examples, the Lord was to give us a glimpse of what He was to provide for us in the future, in the person of Jesus Christ, “the Lamb of God, which was slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8). John the Baptist recognized him as he saw Jesus approach and pointed the attention of his followers toward him: “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The Apostle Paul’s testimony is a more recent and relatable example for us to note the difference between religion and righteousness. Upon seeing the Lord Jesus, Paul realized his religion was as the fig leaves that Adam and Eve had tried to use to cover their sin from God’s sight. He tells us in Philippians 3:4-10: “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more. Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom

I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. That I may know Him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” Paul writes in Galatians 2:16 what he discovered: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, (or any other works) but by the faith of Jesus Christ.” Paul had found the true and only source salvation and righteousness. That which God had provided through Jesus Christ and by which is the only way a person can please God: “That (righteousness) which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God, by faith.”

But not just Paul is righteous, but anyone since Adam, Eve, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, King David, up to our present day—those who have found the grace of God, repented of their sin, ceased from their own works, and rested in the finished work of Jesus Christ, these are the righteous ones, the called out ones, the Church!

Hebrews 12: 1-2 gives us some good admonitions. “Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”

A great old hymn declares:

“ I hear the saviour say thy strength indeed is small,
Child of weakness watch and pray, find in me thine
all in all.

Lord, now indeed I find thy power and thine alone
Can change the lepers spots, and melt the heart of
stone.

For nothing good have I whereby thy grace to
claim,

I’ll wash my garment white in the blood of
Calvary’s Lamb

And when before the throne I stand in Him
complete,

Jesus died my soul to save, my lips shall still repeat
Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe,
Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as
snow.”

In His grace, The Voetberg Family 

News from Ghana

Jim and Fran Lucas

We have been doing very well here except

that I, especially, have missed friendship and true fellowship. Our health has been exceptionally good thanks to God and the prayers of the Saints. James has had a couple bouts of something that laid him up for a few days, but even that was short-lived.

The work here is slow. When James was here the first time, he thought there were more Christians than there actually are. I would say about 60 % or more profess to be Christian, but when you actually talk to them about their faith, you find very few true believers—and those who are lack basic teaching. Most “professing” Christians are involved in fornication, adultery, lying etc. and will readily confess it. On the other hand they are not thieves and are friendly. Therefore, teaching begins from the ground up. There have been four discipleship training programs so far with lots of evangelism in between. We have seen a few committed to the Lord out of that. A new class begins tomorrow if anyone comes. This is not discouraging; it just shows the need is greater than we first thought. Teaching, discipling, and evangelizing is what we will continue with for as long as we are here. Those things are never in vain, and God himself will add unto the church!

Janelle has been here for five months and has been a blessing. She has a women’s Bible study going, and the women seem to enjoy it; and she is learning a lot. I did not start the study. Before we came we agreed that she needed to be occupied with something if she was to be a part of the team. She prayed about it; and the Lord directed her to the Bible study for women. I felt it that was from the Lord, and she started preparing for that ministry long before she arrived. Sometimes there are only two women here—apart from the girls downstairs, but at other times there are about eight. She brought material with her from the States as she had never taught before. The Lord is developing this ministry in her, and it is good to see her growing in faith and ability.

Our papers have finally been approved. Now we are waiting for the official stamp in our passports. The passports are still in Accra at the immigration office. They said it would take about a month more to process said passports, so we are still waiting. The month will be up mid-December so we will see what happens then. Our prayer is that the passports will be returned and everything will be in order.

Love

Francille for the Lucases 

News from ‘Las Cucarachas’, Mexico Len and Marcia Sali

When we first arrived in Atotonilco last year, we

began to hear the names of different small villages or “ranchos” in the area that the local congregation here was praying for.

As the saints prayed for these ranchos by name, one name caught our attention, “Cucarachas.” Like most gringos with limited Spanish, we at least did know that cucarachas were cockroaches, those friendly little fellows who routinely visit in our home. We eventually learned that this was the nickname for a small village, whose true name was “La Concepcion” (The Conception).

Each week at the Tuesday night prayer meeting intercession was made for La Concepcion, for the salvation of the people living there, for a church to be raised up, and for gospel workers. So many times when we pray, we have preconceived ideas of what the answer should look like. As we prayed for workers, in my mind’s eye, I saw either a Mexican couple from the church in Atotonilco moving there or possibly a “missionary family” from the States or another part of Mexico. But God had another idea; and His, of course, was perfect.

Let me tell you a bit about Cucarachas—it is either dusty or muddy depending on the time of year. Houses are made of mud bricks and perch on the edges of a rocky road that winds up a beautiful valley. Life is hard. People are poor, and work is scarce. It is not unusual to see elderly people trudging up the road to go up into the surrounding hills to collect firewood for cooking and then returning with a heavy bundle balanced on their backs as they descend back down into the village. Everyone here knows everyone else, and everyone has always been Catholic

Perched on a hill on the edge of La Concepcion is a house owned by Martha, an American woman of Mexican descent. Martha and her husband built this house over many winters while visiting in La Concepcion, the village of his birth.


Martha’s husband passed away several years ago, but Martha continued to come to La Concepcion each winter as she had come to love the people there.

This last winter Martha, accompanied by her sister Lydia, came for an extended stay. Here is the amazing part! Both of these women are in their 70’s, tiny, short little things who look like everyone’s dream grandmother! But why were they here rather than living in relative comfort in the States with their children and grandchildren? Because God had called them to the work of the gospel in Cucarachas! Now this is not what I had in mind, and I imagine that it was not in the minds of the other brethren as they prayed those many times for workers.

The lives of Martha and Lydia have been the “light set on the hill” in Cucarachas. They have loved their neighbors, invited them into their home, nursed the sick, fed the hungry and shared the good news of the gospel with those who would listen. As a result of their faithful ministry there is now a small group of believers meeting in their home each Friday night for a time of worship, prayer and teaching. How awesome is God and how perfect are His ways!

Please pray for this small group of believers as they stand for their faith in a hostile environment:

- 1) For Martha and Lydia, for continued good health and grace to continue in their ministry there;
- 2) For Rosalva, a young mother who came to faith while living illegally in the States with her husband and 4 children. Believing God calls His children to do all things honestly, she returned to Mexico to file for legal immigrant status in the States. She is living in Cucarachas with her parents and has been waiting almost a year to receive her visa with no sign that she will receive it any time soon. Please pray that she can be reunited with her family soon.
- 3) For Nicholas, Rosalva’s father, who is also a believer. As one of only two or three men who have believed in the village, he has been the primary target of those who wish to belittle and deride anyone who chooses to follow Christ. Nicholas has suffered much from his friends and family; please pray for courage and peace.
- 4) For the children who come on Friday nights. Many have been forbidden to come by their parents at the behest of the priest, but a small group does continue to come. Last week we saw a ten year old girl shed tears as she prayed to receive Christ. Please pray for salvation and protection for these little ones.

Len and Marcia Sali 

Atotonilco, Mexico

Steve and Linda Montgomery

I have a hernia at the site of incision as a complication from the my operation. Three layers of muscle have to be penetrated to reach the abdominal cavity, and one of these layers did not heal as anticipated. Therefore, surgical intervention is necessary. I was scheduled to go into the hospital Friday, December 9). The operation was to be at 11 am our time, and I was to remain in the hospital for 24 hrs. Post-operation, I will be restricted from traveling for three to four weeks and, of course, limited in lifting for a


time.

I want to thank all of you who prayed and continue to pray for us regarding the previous operation. This is, of course, not as invasive or drastic a surgery; and we anticipate a quick and full recovery. We do, however, value your intercession.

Please pray:

1. That the operation and time in the hospital will go well and the problem will be fixed.
2. For the recovery time. I will need wisdom and grace to keep the restrictions and at the same time fulfill my responsibilities.
3. For Linda, who takes the brunt of my physical care. This has been very hard for her emotionally. Today is her birthday.
4. For the congregation here, as they take more and more of the responsibility for the daily life of the church.

Thank you for being co-laborers and fellow-soldiers with us.

Steve 

An Update on Steve from Nate Montgomery


First the Good news,

Dad is home and in his own bed. The doctors say that the surgery went well. However...

Dad reports that this surgery was much more painful than the previous one. He is in pain and in struggling to keep anything down. The drain from the surgery got clogged and had to be cleaned out. Marcia Sali, a “Good Samaritan” in every sense of the word, just helped with a shot to minimize the vomiting. Coughing hurts, yet he coughs a lot.

Please continue to pray for my folks. Pray that Dad would recover quickly and pray for Mom as she nurses him back to health. There are many potential dangers including infection, pneumonia, etc. Pray that the Lord would choose to show himself mighty over all of these.

Thank you for your prayer,

Nathan D Montgomery 

News from Loreto, Mexico

Mike and Faith Ball

Greetings from Wyoming in the name of Jesus. We left Loreto on the 19th of November, and we write this on Dec. 6 from Torrington, WY. Just to refresh your memory, last year in May we left Mexico for 4 months, leaving the congregation in charge of three men. When we returned at the end of Sept., we were thinking that we would be back for about a year (more if necessary) to continue working with the men to be able to permanently



turn over the leadership to these men. During this last year plus, Mike also started preaching in the nearby town of Villa Garcia (a half hour's drive from Loreto).

A few months ago, we decided that it was time to turn the church over to the elders, so we gave them a four-month notice that we would be leaving. We decided to come back to the Torrington area, where we lived for the 3 years prior to going to Loreto, to be close to our sending church just across the state line in Mitchell, NE.

To briefly explain our decision to leave Loreto and return here, we are not much on using man-made mission methods, so when in doubt, we like to refer to examples from Scripture. In the book of Acts we see that Paul and Barnabas were sent out by their local church to the work that the Holy Spirit had given them to do. When they had finished establishing elders in the towns where they had preached, they returned to the church in Antioch. They returned because they had finished the work that the Holy Spirit had given them to do. They didn't seek out their own work to do. They stayed in their local church until they were led of the Lord to return to the field.

In our case, we were sent out from the church in Mitchell to Loreto to do the work that God had told us to do. That work was to establish leadership in the church in Loreto, by training the men to do the work of pastoring the flock and evangelizing. When we saw that the men were able to teach and care for the flock and were faithful in evangelism (both in Loreto and Villa Garcia), we knew that the work had been accomplished. It was time for us to go back to our sending church. To stay longer or to go elsewhere on our own initiative would be to take things into our own hands. We would no longer be doing what God had sent us to do, but what we thought was best. So we will be in this area for a while so that we can (on most Sundays) be with the church in Mitchell. We feel it is Biblical that we be subject to the brethren here until the Lord leads us elsewhere.

For the present, Austin and Mike will be working

together in whatever is available until the middle of January when Austin plans to leave for Ghana, Africa. He plans to join Jim Lucas and other missionaries there in the training center. This center was started almost a year ago to train national workers to go out to the unreached tribes in Ghana. Austin plans to be there for 2 years and would like to leave Jan. 12. He will be working to be able to pay for this trip.

Shield of Faith Mission has asked us to help out with the annual training program that runs from January to July. We are praying about going out there to Bend, Oregon for 3 months, April to July. Meanwhile, Mike will be working wherever he can find work. Please pray that we would know God's will. Also, please pray for provisions for Austin's trip and living expenses in Ghana. If you are interested in helping him out, gifts can be sent through Shield of Faith.

Please pray for the elders in Loreto: Manolo, Juan Jose, and Tonio. Please pray for a family in Mastranto. Jose is a brother from Mastranto, who was the only Christian in that little village until September when his niece came to know the Lord. Jose's sister and some of her children accepted a Bible study from Manolo after years of hearing Jose preach the gospel to them. At the second Bible study, Jose's niece got saved and was baptized a couple of days later. Another of Jose's nieces had gotten saved in Zacatecas, and she moved back out to Mastranto. So now the Christian population there had tripled. Manolo continues to go out to give Bible studies once a week to this family. Jose's sister and husband attend meetings on Sunday. They have 20 children, and we would appreciate your prayers for salvation of the whole family.


Please pray for TJ, who will be starting the training program in Bend in January. Please pray that God will teach him, and that God will provide for his financial needs while there.

Last but not least, please pray for Faith as she will be trying to squeeze in schooling for the kids in this unsettled schedule. God has given Faith a lot of grace in this move, both in the midst of all the stress of moving and still being on the move. Thank you for all your prayers. We saw God's hand in arranging things so we could leave when we needed to leave (since our papers were running out). We got the documents for Ethan about a week before we left, and the pickup got out of the shop the night before Mike had to take it to the border. There had been a fire under the hood, and it was out of commission for a month. The Lord brought Mike's brother Ken and family down to help us move a trailer full of stuff out. We are sure thankful to them for their great help in getting our stuff up to

Torrington. We appreciate your continued prayers and support until we either know we are not going to be teaching at the training program or finish our time there. Mike will be needing work since the cost of living is quite high in Bend.

I'll close for now, since Ethan (the baby - just turned one, and has learned to walk) is bugging Daddy to pick him up.

In Christ's love,

Mike and Faith for the family 

MikeBall@bigfoot.com



News from from Other Fields

[Editors Note: These believers are known to some SFMI workers]

Alimjan Yimit

November 11 (Compass Direct News) – Chinese officials have yet to declare a new court

date for Alimjan Yimit, a Christian house church leader and ethnic Uyghur in China's northwest province of Xinjiang detained since his arrest on Jan. 12. State prosecutors in mid-October returned Alimjan's case to a Xinjiang court for consideration.

Once a Muslim, Alimjan converted to Christianity more than 10 years ago and became active in the growing Uyghur church. Friends said they believe his faith is the real reason for his arrest.

Charges against Alimjan include "inciting secessionist sentiment to split the country" and "collecting and selling intelligence for overseas organizations." Officials have threatened to hand down a sentence ranging from as much as six years in prison to execution. His wife Gulnur has consistently proclaimed his innocence, pointing out that as an agricultural worker he had no access to information affecting national security and therefore could not be guilty of leaking such information.

Alimjan's hair, dark when police arrested

him on Jan. 12, is now graying as a result of harsh conditions in detention, sources said. He continues in prison, while the government gives no indication of when there will be a new trial or why he has not been released.




Osman and Family

Osmin Imin has been in the hands of the Chinese state for one year because of his faith in Christ and the

leadership he has provided to the Uyghur church. He was arrested on November 19, 2007 "for the crime of divulging State secrets" (talking to foreigners). He was sentenced to two years in the laogai: a network of more than 1000 Mao-era, iron-curtain "re-education through labour" prison camps: farms, industries and factories that use CCP-supplied slave labor. Osman, who was already injured and suffering malnutrition, has aged dramatically, and his health has deteriorated due to conditions in a labor camp where he is forced to work 12 to 15 hours per day.

Osman was first detained and tortured in October 2004. During his initial detention, he was chained to a metal bed and beaten repeatedly.

PRAY SPECIFICALLY THAT:

- God will sustain and protect Osman and Alimjan, their families and their fellowship groups; that He will increase their faith, build their character and provide justice. Pray Col. 1:9-14 for them.
- The Church in Xinjiang, especially the Han Chinese believers, will be advocates for the rights of their Uyghur fellow believers and help meet their needs despite the cost, thereby increasing love and unity among the believers.
- That God will manifest justice in their case even as He administers grace to the prisoners and their families (Heb. 13:3). 

The SFMI Prayer/News Update is published bi-monthly to serve the SFMI missionaries and the church of Jesus Christ by presenting Bible-centered teaching, practical exhortation and current information from the field that will encourage prayer for the fulfilling of the Great Commission. Contributions to help defray the \$6/year/subscriber publication cost are accepted but not solicited. Please submit any address changes to sfmi@sfmiusa.com.

Scheduled Appointments and the Providence of God

By Nate Montgomery

The incredibly dynamic way that God uses individuals to fulfill His “Great Commandment” and “Great Commission” is nothing short of amazing! Neither distance nor borders nor language nor cultural barriers will keep His message from capturing hearts for the Son!

Three years ago a young man called my office and asked me for a job as a mortgage broker. At the time I was not wild about training a new totally raw recruit but before simply saying “No,” I suggested he give me time to think.

“When I get back from Mexico, we’ll talk,” I told him. A week later my family and I all went to visit my mom and dad in Atotonilco, where we visited for four weeks (or 25 lbs., whichever method of measuring best captures the essence of our visit).

Upon my return I scheduled an appointment with this young man who became more interested in hearing about Mexico than the job. It turned out that I knew his parents and had done a loan for them some time prior. It also came out that, although he is a second generation American, his parents were from a small town, Jesus Maria, just outside of Atotonilco in the heart of the Circle of Silence. I recalled that I had spoken of Christ to his parents at the time of their loan, and we talked about my parents’ work in the Highlands.

Last Friday I went into the bank and while there ran into this young man’s mom. We exchanged pleasantries; and then I said, “Ay Señora! We just came back from your pueblo.” I proceeded to describe our recent trip to the Highlands, where my wife and I had joined a team to minister at a leader’s retreat. I mistakenly thought we had been in her town, when actually we

had been in San Jose de Gracia. She was impressed, however, that we had been to the towns she knew. She proceeded to tell me something of eternal significance:

“Since we last talked I have become a Christian. My husband’s family are all from Jesus Maria, and they know your dad because he is the American missionary that is always going all around there teaching Bible studies and preaching. I have been asking my husband to go to church with me, but I have not pressured him because I want him to choose to come, not just come to make me happy. Last week he told me, ‘I’ll go to church with you, if you go to the church where that guy that does our loans is. He and his family are from the same area where my family is and he knows what we are like.’”

So here we have yet another strange and unpredictable connection between Central Washington and Central Mexico. The Lord is using people there and people here to reach people from there and people from here.

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom. 11:33)

Join with us in thanking God for the manner in which He works to bring people to Himself, and pray for this family. Elias Garcia and I will be visiting the husband in a few days. Perhaps by the time you read this, he will have believed the Gospel. Pray for the continued extension of the Gospel in the Highlands. Pray that some from the Circle of Silence who are converted in the States would visit or return to these areas as messengers of Christ.

Nate Montgomery is the son of Steve and Linda Montgomery, SFMI missionaries currently serving in Central Mexico. Nate and his wife La Sarah live in Yakima, Washington.

On Distinctions and Doctrine, continued

truth came with the incarnation of Jesus. Every true and key doctrine for the church will be taught preponderantly in the New Testament.

CONVICTION

Convictions are an aspect of the practical application of doctrine to decisions of our daily lives. A convictionless Christianity will be a Christianity that is more religion than life, more talk than walk.

But what is the authority upon which conviction is based? Convictions are based on the Scripture and on circumstances. The Apostle Paul gives an example in Rom. 14:21 "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak." Paul is not teaching the Doctrine of Vegetarianism here. He is presenting a practical application to the teaching of Scripture: 'I adopt the conviction that I will not drink wine or eat meat while I live among these brethren, lest any should be stumbled.' It is not Scripture alone, but Scripture + Circumstances that leads to this conviction.


OPINION

An opinion is based on circumstances, background and experience, influenced, one hopes, by the Scripture. Opinions are the conclusions we arrive at based on our cultural and family background, our situation and a lifetime of experiences. As Christians, our opinions will be more and more influenced by Scripture as we know and read it. A thoroughly converted person will have opinions more thoroughly

influenced by the Bible. Thus, when we seek out advice, we should not make Rehoboam's mistake of seeking out those with the least experience to draw from, nor should we expect to find the best advice in the mouth of those who ignore God's Word.

EXAMPLES

Concerning clothing, the *doctrine* of Scripture is that we dress modestly (1 Tim. 2:9, 1 Pe. 3:3-4). My *conviction* might be that my wife and daughters should not wear pants. *Opinion* is that one should not wear white after Labor Day.

In politics, the *doctrine* of Scripture is that as members of a new kingdom our citizenship is in heaven (Col. 1:12-14, Heb. 12:28). Thus we vote where our citizenship is, that is, we pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1-2). *Conviction* will determine how we handle popular elections in the country where we live. Some Christians have a strong conviction that we should not vote in the popular elections of our country, while others feel just as strongly that we must. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind because this is a *conviction* (Rom. 14:5). An *opinion* would be that we should vote for a certain candidate. Some opinions are right, while others are wrong; but no matter how right an opinion may be, it does not rise above the level of opinion. Having set this most essential distinction between doctrine, conviction and opinion, we will continue in the next issue with the other four distinguishing areas: extension, importance, communication and development. 

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