

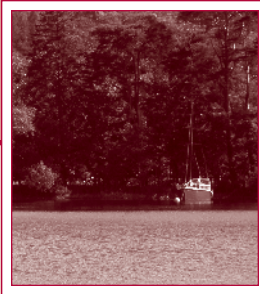


# Seeing Things God's Way

Volume 3

Essays by Gene Shelburne

THE CHRISTIAN  
**Appeal**



# Seeing Things God's Way

**E**ver since those first years in Eden, we humans have imagined that we know more than our Creator about how to run our world. In every age, it seems, the majority of us have been like the misguided souls the apostle Paul describes in Romans 10:3. “Refusing to accept God’s way,” he said, “they cling to their own way” (NLT).

Hopefully, Senior Editor Gene Shelburne’s devotional essays in this month’s *Appeal* will help us to see what a deadly mess we create when we ignore the Lord and decide to do things our way instead of his.

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John Gulley

**“W**e know that we have come to know him [Jesus Christ] if we keep his commands.”



**The Apostle John**  
*1 John 2*

# Seeing Things God's Way

## Upgrading Our World

Reuters news service reported two or three years ago that, just south of Tokyo, a knife-wielding Japanese man in his twenties invaded a center for the disabled. After slaughtering 19 residents of the center and wounding 24 others, the attacker explained, "I want to get rid of the disabled from this world."

So did the Nazis in Hitler's Germany.

So do those who favor aborting babies diagnosed with serious defects.

Never mind that this passion to "improve" our world by exterminating those who are crippled or disabled would have kept humanity from ever hearing the music of a deaf composer like Beethoven.

It would have robbed multiple generations of the biblical insights conveyed through the lines of a blind author such as John Milton. His *Paradise Lost* would have been forever lost if genetic and physiological cleansing had been accepted then as the wise, progressive policy of our world.

Curious as it may seem, even atheist Stephen Hawking's derisive attacks on all believers and their beliefs would have been squelched by his philosophical kinsmen who advocate eugenics.


No matter how high his IQ, a man as sadly deformed and impaired as Hawking would be a prime target of those who propose to upgrade our world by eliminating all who are physically less than perfect.

Defective humans like that obviously have to go if we're going to clean up humanity's DNA. At least, that's the conviction of social zealots like that young Japanese slasher.

And it's not just a matter of refining our genetics. The same thinking would ask why society should pay the price to feed and care for those who are no longer productive. Why should healthy citizens be taxed to prolong the parasitical existence of those who are aged, infirm, or crippled?

Such a strategy of human redemption is the exact opposite to that espoused by Jesus, of course. He chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. He sided with the foolish to expose the wise.

As Robert Capon put it so memorably, our Lord rebutted worldly standards by championing "the last, the least, the lost, the little, and the dead."

Jesus was so gentle that he wouldn't snuff a wick or snap off a flower. How much are we like him? 

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## Dead Cats

No doubt I should start off by confessing that I don't know much about what really happened or why. When I saw the online news story, however—the one about a veterinarian whose license was yanked by the state because she killed a cat, the whole thing hit me wrong.

I grew up in a generation before PETA, before animals began to have more rights than humans, back when the biblical order of creation put man in charge of the animals. Turning that hierarchy topsy-turvy messes with a lot more than the population of puppies and kitty cats and snail darters.

According to that brief news report, the defrocked vet bragged on social media that she bull's-eyed a feline with a well-aimed arrow. Why did she shoot the critter? I have no idea. But my gut-level conviction is that she had every right to do so, especially if the cat died without suffering.

It just happened that I came across that news item on my laptop while I was sitting at the kitchen table in the Key Place, my mother's childhood home. Not more than fifty yards from my grandfather's old barn.

Granddaddy welcomed cats in that barn. They took care of the rats and the mice, just as God designed

the system to work. But the cats were too fertile for their own good, so our grandfather would explain to us kids occasionally that he had "thinned out" the cats.


Just how he did that he didn't describe to us. I'm sure his extermination method was quick and painless. But it was effective. When Granddaddy got done, the extra cats were as dead as the one the veterinarian plunked.

All the vets I've known and virtually every Christian rancher I have known liked animals and took good care of them. Even when they knew it was time for one to die.

Another incredible coincidence occurred less than half an hour after I first read about the vet and the cat.

I was startled when something crashed into the bottom of the metal screen door just a few feet from me. What was that? I wondered. Then I saw the guilty cat prancing across our back pasture with a soon-to-be-dead dove fluttering in its mouth.

If that poor vet gets whacked for killing a cat, what should happen to a killer-cat?

Life surely was a lot simpler when we let the Creator decide such matters. 



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## When Prayer Doesn't Work

Prayer may be the most perplexing puzzle serious believers ever face. If you doubt that, read the probing books of deep thinkers and true believers such as C. S. Lewis or Philip Yancey. They didn't quit believing, but they never got all their prayer questions sorted out.

Today I received a sweet, thoughtful note from a longtime friend. As age creeps up on her, her failing ears and her thinning voice frustrate her. So much so that she has been talking to God about it. Without seeing any noticeable improvements.

What do you think about this? she asked me. Let me share with you part of my reply to this good lady.

*Is it ever useless to pray? you ask.*

*My short answer is No. But both you and I know that the rest of the answer is that even as we intone our prayers to the Almighty, we are always aware that we may not receive what we ask for. This doesn't keep us from praying.*

*I would enlarge on this by observing that not getting what we request may be an expression of the Lord's grace. He knows better than us what we really need—what will*


*bless us. When he says No to us, he may be acting as a loving Father who knows what will help and what will hurt his child.*

*I suspect that we're a lot like the apostle Paul who prayed multiple times that his "thorn in the flesh" be removed. Later Paul admitted that not getting that prayer answered positively actually strengthened his faith. He could be describing you.*

*You're right, of course, in recognizing that God could do anything we ask him to. We should be grateful that he doesn't. No loving parent gives a child everything the child asks for.*

*We also know that when it seems that God is telling us No, sometimes he's actually saying Not now. Of course, I want what I want now.*

*Even if God doesn't repair our aging ears or eyes or muscles when we ask him to, still the prayers we utter are not useless. If for no other reason, because they affirm our continued trust in him. They keep our conversation with him open and alive, thus providing an outlet for our doubts and fears and anger and delight.*

I concluded my reply by telling my friend: I suspect that you're ahead of me on all of this. Keep on praying, dear lady. 

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## Divine Aftershocks

Shortly before Thanksgiving in 2016, residents of northeast Japan were terrified when a magnitude 7.4 earthquake rattled their territory and triggered tsunamis.

Experts described it as "an aftershock of the devastating 2011 quake" that destroyed much of that region, leaving millions homeless and 18,000 dead. More aftershocks might occur soon, they warned.

Yushiro Umeda, seismologist at Kyoto University, told a talk-show audience that "aftershocks could continue not only for five years but as long as 100 years."

His comment amazed me. I had never heard anybody say that before. Probably because nobody since Abraham or Noah has stayed around long enough to observe such a pattern.

But the remarks by that earthquake expert got me to thinking. In recent Bible studies we had run across several stories where present events were linked to mistakes or to good deeds done centuries before.

In 1 Samuel 15, for example, God tells King Saul that he has decided to settle accounts with the Amalekite tribe for the snotty way they treated the request of Moses and Israel, "Can we pass through your land?" When I did a bit of biblical math, I was stunned to see that almost 400 years separated the


offense and the punishment. Evidently God has a really good memory!

I found myself wondering out loud what mistakes of our Puritan (or Viking, or Sioux) ancestors God might decide to punish us for today. That's a scary thought.

Thankfully, the Lord remembers the good we do and not just the bad. 1 Kings 15 tells us that God not only let King David's worthless great-grandson Abijah wear the crown, but he made his reign in Jerusalem successful. Why? Because over a century before, David "had done what was right in the eyes of the Lord." A century later, Jerusalem felt the aftershock of his righteousness.

"Blame the frackers!" some tell us as they diagnose the cause of recent Oklahoma earthquakes. Maybe they have it right. But, if that Japanese expert knows what he's talking about, maybe the anti-fracking folks should be blaming a quake that happened a hundred years ago.

And how far back should you and I be looking to explain why our families are so blessed today? The God who says he repays sins to the third and fourth generations tells us that he rewards right living for a thousand.

Only the eternal God knows what ancient good deed he is rewarding today. 

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## The Easter Earthquake

That first Easter morning was quiet. A silent as a tomb. Until that earthquake struck.

Matthew calls it “a violent earthquake.” It wasn’t just a tiny tremor. It went off like a bomb.

This was the second seismic event in three days. On Friday afternoon, during that scary eclipse, the ground had rumbled so roughly that all around Jerusalem tombs broke open. Then came the big quake—the Easter earthquake—that opened the tomb.

Matthew documents six responses to this quake.

First, the guards at the tomb trembled and froze.

Then the women who were coming to embalm their Lord instead “quickly departed from the tomb with great fear and ran to tell the disciples.”

Third, the women encountered the risen Christ and “took hold of his feet and worshiped him.”

The fourth reaction happened somewhere downtown. When the soldiers reported that the tomb was no longer sealed and the body was missing, the elders bribed them and told them exactly what lies to tell.

We might include this in the fourth response, or we might list as Number Five the fact that the soldiers took the

hush money and lied just as they had been told to.

The sixth response was by the apostles themselves, and it was a mixed one. Matthew tells us that when they saw Jesus alive, “they worshiped him.” Then he added, “But some doubted.”

What a gamut of reactions to that earthquake and its result! Everything from terror and lying and bribery to fear and doubt and worship and great joy—all of them triggered by the same earthquake.

Incredibly, the events of that first Easter still kindle the same responses in hearts and lives today.

Through the centuries, those who reject the claims of Jesus have imitated the men who tried so hard to hide the results of that earthquake. They have conjured up a jillion reasons not to accept the reality of that open grave and devised a swarm of strategies to obliterate the fact that it happened.

On the other hand, believers worldwide rehearse the saga of that Easter morning and point to the risen Lord as one of the main reasons for their faith in him. Like the women at the tomb, they can’t wait to tell the good news to everybody.

Which of these responses will be yours this Easter? *CA*

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## The Gift and the Giver

My closest buddy during junior high and high school was a talented fellow named Tom Laceky. Tom and I became co-editors of our high school newspaper.

When we graduated and went separate ways, Tom’s sharpness and his writing skills took him to the top of his class in a premier journalism school and on to a lifelong career with Associated Press.

This thumbnail sketch of my friend may help you understand why his words that I’m about to share with you pack so much punch. In an e-mail a few years ago, displaying his talent as a top-notch wordsmith, Tom sent me the following sketch of true paternal love.

“I was stopped at a traffic light this morning when a big white pickup truck from Washington state pulled alongside me in the turn lane.

“It was towing one of those low flatbed trailers, maybe twenty feet long, and three or four of those heavy-duty, webbed cargo straps were firmly anchoring the cargo.

“At least one strap reached from one side of the trailer to the other, another crossed at an angle, still another from front to rear.

“The entire cargo, in the exact

center of the trailer, was a brand new, shiny, red tricycle.”

Wow! That vignette grabs my heart. Yours too, I bet. That unnamed daddy behind the wheel of that pickup was about to deliver an incredible message of love to his child.

My guess is, however, that the heart touched most profoundly by that trailer load did not belong to the toddler about to receive the gift. A kid small enough to ride that trike probably was too young to absorb the full significance of that carefully crafted delivery scene.

But the father who hitched up that big trailer surely imparted waves of love as he snugged up each of those cargo straps. The outlandish proportions of his trailer compared to his load spoke volumes about the size of his love for that child.

Without us realizing it at first, Tom’s word picture of that tricycle trailer confirms Jesus’ famous axiom that indeed the greatest happiness always belongs to the giver instead of the receiver.

We’re never happier than when we’re doing something inordinately lavish for somebody who doesn’t expect or deserve our gift. *CA*

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## A Crumbled Dream

Does the name Alexander Campbell mean anything to you? If you grew up in any kind of Church of Christ or Christian Church, you need to know about him. He was the founder of our American denomination.

Let me confess that, although I did grow up in such a church, I knew little about the man until I was invited to join a host of church leaders at his home in Bethany, West Virginia—way back in 1966—to mark the one hundredth anniversary of Mr. Campbell's death.

During that memorable week I learned that Alexander Campbell did more than found churches. In the college he built, he educated the sons of U.S. presidents.

Few people noticed when Campbell boosted American wool trade by importing new breeds of sheep. Nor were many folks impressed when he was elected to West Virginia's legislature. But his star was slowly rising.

Even founding hundreds of congregations across our young, growing country didn't catapult Campbell to fame. He became a household name after debating—while befriending—the famous atheist Robert Owen.


In his prime, this school-founding, sheep-raising, church-planting country parson was invited to address the combined houses of the U.S. Congress. In

many ways he had become the Billy Graham of his day.

During that 1966 gathering in Bethany, however, we also focused on the Civil War years right before Campbell's death. The halls of Bethany College were quiet—almost deserted—while that brutal war was raging not far away. Most of the students were on the battle lines.

Campbell's heart was broken. His own family was split, with favorite nephews wearing uniforms both blue and gray. Still worse, from his view, Christian brothers from churches he had planted and nurtured now were slaughtering each other.

The young nation that Campbell had mistaken for the eve of Christ's thousand-year reign had morphed into a hell on earth. Campbell's dream had become a nightmare. As Will Durant would later write: "From barbarism to civilization requires a century; from civilization to barbarism needs but a day." Campbell saw barbarism in his final days, and it made him mourn.

As July Fourth rolled around last year, I rehearsed this sad but true story as a reminder that the peace and freedom and prosperity we cherish can dissolve over night into blood and hate and tears. It did once. It can again. 

# Seeing Things God's Way

## It's a Lock

In his book *Significant Others*, world religions professor Monte Cox offers a description of Japan's Shinto-rooted morals that roused some of my memories.

Over a quarter of a century ago, my wife and I flew to Okinawa to welcome our newest granddaughter.

One day during our visit, her daddy—our Marine JAG attorney son—took me with him when he drove up the island to take care of some JAG business. On the way home, he detoured through the downtown streets of the central city, Naha, to make a quick stop.

When he parked, I jumped out of the car and started to lock my door. "You don't need to do that," he stopped me. "Nobody here ever steals anything."

I was shocked. Instantly I recalled the time just a year or so earlier when he and I had parked his car beside a curb in downtown Naples, Italy.

When I locked my door that day, Jon instructed me, "Don't ever do that here." When I looked puzzled, he explained, "If you lock it, the thugs will bash in a window. They're going to get inside. If you want windows when you come back, leave your car unlocked."

Two places on opposite sides of the planet. The same instructions:

don't lock. For totally opposite reasons: honest citizens one place, thieves in the other.


All of this flashed out of my memory bank when I read Monte Cox's observation that the rise of secularism in modern Japan has not yet extinguished the traditional morals of hard work, trustworthiness, and honesty bred by centuries of Shintoism.

If a person were to lose their wallet in a Tokyo airport or taxi cab, Cox wrote, whoever found it would almost certainly turn it in at the nearest police station. Can you imagine what would happen if you lost your wallet in Los Angeles or Chicago?

Here in America those of us who grew up in a generation that never locked their cars or houses are shocked by the rapid rise of violent crimes and ID theft. Any honesty bred in ancestral Christian faith is fast waning.

Why? Why are our Christian values vanishing while, in Japan, Shinto morals hang on?

Strong family ties seem to be the most obvious difference. Japan's citizens honor their ancestors. Most inner-city gang members can't identify their own father.

More police and bigger jails won't solve that problem. "Honor your father and mother," God says, "that it may be well with you." 

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## Two Beggars

As we neared the five hundredth anniversary of those famous theses Martin Luther nailed to that church door in Germany, historians were having a heyday.

That famous Catholic-priest-turned-Protestant-pastor wrote and published more pages than just about any known writer. So his still emerging corpus of documents provides an almost endless supply of quotations on an incredible range of subjects. Almost always in language that is earthy, robust, fun, and often raunchy.

I knew little about Luther's personal life until I read Dyron Daugherty's biography of the great reformer. His account of Luther's last days touched me.

Luther knew he was dying. A decade earlier, he had come close, but God had given him a reprieve. When he passed half a dozen massive kidney stones and got relief from a week of constipation, the always-controversial theologian perked up and went back to work that time.

But his weakened heart finally failed. The friends who tried to revive him recorded his words during his last hours. But those turned out not to be his last words. After Luther died, in his pants


pocket his friends found a note in his distinctive handwriting: "This is true. All of us are beggars."

During that same year of the quincentennial of the famous Luther theses-nailing, the pope emeritus—Benedict XVI—granted to author Peter Seewald what the retired pope insisted would be his final interview, his last public words.

Just a day or so after I first read Martin Luther's last words, I came across Pope Benedict's words in a book review in *Touchstone* magazine.

In what he intended to be the last two or three sentences he uttered for public quotation, this unusual pope confessed, "I am just a lowly little man." He said that he often pleads with God "to show leniency toward my wretchedness."

If you know much about church history, I don't need to tell you that Martin Luther spent his adult days locked in bitter confrontations with the popes of his time. What we call Protestantism resulted from that theological head-butting.

For eternal salvation, we must depend not on what we do but on what Jesus has done for us, Luther insisted. We bring nothing of any worth to God. Evidently five centuries later he and the pope now agree. 

# Seeing Things God's Way

## Yesterday, Today, and . . .

Wikipedia accredits a nineteenth-century Frenchman named Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr as the author of the well-known proverb, "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

Karr came along at least a couple of millennia later, of course, than the wise man who began Ecclesiastes lamenting that there is nothing new under the sun.

I got an up-close reminder of this truth when I spent several weeks editing an extensive collection of editorials written by my preacher/editor father.

Early in 1936 my dad published the first issue of a magazine he called *Gospel Tidings*. For at least the next two decades he wrote editorials for each monthly issue.

In the one for November 1939, he expressed concern about "serious perils" that "now threaten the home." He urged his godly readers to stand up against such threats in what he called "this age of divorces, free love, companionate marriage, and loose morals."

Dad sounded that alarm 80 years ago, before WWII, before hippies, before the Vietnam era, before this present age of secular disdain for traditional morals. But it sounded as if he might have written it yesterday.

I was still processing this surprising discovery in my father's early journalistic output when I came across an even more impressive example of the same time-defying phenomenon in Mary Elizabeth Podles' fine column in *Touchstone* magazine.

Her column that month focused on the artist El Greco's depictions of Mary's Joseph. She prefaced her piece by observing, "At the end of the Middle Ages, marriage was in an increasingly sorry state." The moral mess she's describing dates back at least 500 years ago.

"Social and economic changes had pushed the marriage age for men later," Podles explains, "while for women, it grew younger. This resulted in a good bit of disaffection all around."

The result? Podles says, "Divorce, or rather annulment on complicated grounds of consanguinity, was rife. Families fell apart."

Is this smattering of evidence sufficient to alert us to the fragility of marriage and family ties in every generation? Back in "the good old days"—regardless of when that was—societal shifts of some sort made it hard to keep a family intact.

Today's domestic challenges really are no different. 



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## A Birthday Essay on Prayer

I knew nothing about it at the time, of course, but on the day I turned six years old, C. S. Lewis' essay on "Work and Prayer" was first published in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*.

More than 25 years elapsed before I saw that essay the first time. Another 45 birthdays passed before I again pulled from my bookshelves Lewis' now-famous volume of essays entitled *God in the Dock*. In it I read again, just four days before I turned 78, Lewis' brief but compelling answer to critics' claims that prayers by puny humans make no sense if God can do anything he wants to anyway, and especially not if God loves us.

Why should we have to ask God to do anything for us if he already knows what we need and he wants what is best for us?

That's a serious, sensible question. One that has been posed by thoughtful believers in every generation. Lewis' simple answer makes even more good sense.


Some devout Christians solve these prayer questions by dividing prayer into two sorts—a higher, holier brand that consists purely of praise and intercourse with the Maker, and a lower, less noble brand of "Our Father" conversation filled with all manner of

requests. They suggest that we should be diligent in practicing the noble praise-type praying while avoiding the more selfish, do-this-for-me approach.

Lewis refuted this strategy, in part because Jesus himself tells us to pray for daily bread and forgiven sins. But, delving deeper into the issues at hand, Lewis pointed out that any human who helps someone else is filling a need our loving God knew about and could have done. The argument against praying for God's help also precludes our doing any good deed for a loved one in need.

The Creator amazingly (and lovingly) decided to allow us humans to do as much good or harm as we elect to. Thus he grants us the incredible dignity of freedom.

In his essay, though, Lewis notes that God lovingly retains the right to nix our foolish or hurtful requests. "Had He not done so," Lewis admits, "prayer would be an activity too dangerous for man."

Instead of blaming God for unanswered prayers, we ought to fall to our knees and thank him for loving us enough to sometimes tell us, "Not now," or even, "No." If the Almighty could not second-guess our wishes, Lewis said on my birthday, "prayer would destroy us." 

# Seeing Things God's Way

## Boys and Girls

Life was a lot simpler when we highly educated humans were content to do it God's way.

We don't make it to the end of the first chapter in our Bibles before we read that the Creator made us male and female. But a bunch of us moderns think we're smarter than the God who made us.

Can you imagine having to teach Biology 101 in a public school today? In the current confused climate, a single traditional lesson on gender might compromise a veteran teacher's future in the classroom.

What if an unsuspecting Ag professor insisted on distinguishing between bulls and cows, or stallions and mares? Scrub all sensible instruction to young ranchers about breeding in today's wacky world.

Some of my longtime good friends are coaches. In just about every sport. I can't even guess what kind of issues they are facing now that the traditional division between girls and boys sports is crumbling fast.

In the spring of 2017, did you keep up with breaking news about UIL wrestling competition in Texas? If I understood the walking-on-eggs sports reports, a boy won first place in the girls' bracket.

It was inevitable, of course.


Already our befuddled courts have ruled against school systems that dare to make their restrooms and locker rooms conform to biological reality.

How long before males nab all the gold medals in female track events, kick all the goals in girls soccer matches, and post the best times in female swimming meets?

The same great God who made us male and female started off creation by separating light from darkness. What would we think about someone too benighted to tell the difference in night and day? Or someone too addled to know up from down, red from green, or hot from cold?

Category confusion can be an indication of serious deficiencies, can't it? So serious that the prophet Isaiah warned all who were so mixed up: "You are doomed!"

"You call evil good and call good evil," he told them. "You turn darkness into light and light into darkness. You make what is bitter sweet, and what is sweet you make bitter."

"You think you are wise, so very clever," Isaiah scolded the category-confusers of his generation. But the truth is, he said, "You are doomed!" (5:20-21 TEV). 



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## Home Confinement

**D**id you see that odd news report about the Kansas guy who robbed a bank, not to get the cash, but in order to get arrested and put in prison?

Suffering some sort of post-surgery depression, this usually-sensible fellow got into a tiff with his wife. "I'd rather be in jail than stuck here with you," he muttered, so he held up a nearby bank and then sat down in the lobby and waited to be arrested.

The prosecutor and judge on his case could see that this volunteer prisoner was not really a bank robber. It was clear to them that he didn't belong in a cell, so the judge sentenced him—are you ready for this?—he sentenced him to the very ordeal the robber was trying to escape: six months of home confinement.


In every marriage, occasional disagreements come up. Some of them get hot enough to boil over. Others are mere momentary tiffs. How we deal with them at the moment will depend on an endless assortment of variables, such as a tight budget, lack of sleep, frustrations at work, or maybe an overloaded calendar.

And, truth be told, some spouses are more gifted with patience than the rest of us. Two short-fuse mates under the same roof can expect more

fireworks. But mature Christians know when they say "I do" that some days inevitably will be "for worse." Our promise at the wedding altar is to hang tough in those hard times.

Years ago (so long ago I can't recall the source) I read about one woman who hired a medium to bring back the spirit of her dead husband. When his ghost showed up, she asked him, "Honey, is it really better up there?" Without hesitation he answered, "Oh, yes, it is much better. But I'm not *up* there!"

I guess he would have sympathized with the bank robber we started with. And, while most of us probably chuckled at that made-up seance tale, the years when I unwisely tried to do some marital counseling showed me that bliss is not the right word to describe some marriages. Some of them, as the dead man implied, can be hell-on-earth.

In marriage, perhaps more than in any other human relationship, all of us need an abundance of what the Bible calls "the fruit of the Spirit"—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Only with the help of heaven can our homes be places where anybody would want to be confined. 

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## It's the Law

**I**n mid-June of 2017, U.S. District Judge Roger Vinson, gave municipal authorities in Pensacola, Florida, thirty days to remove an imposing cross that had stood in their Bayview Park for seventy-six years.

During those years, that cross served year after year as a rallying point for civic functions on Memorial Day and Veteran's Day. Also for Easter sunrise services. Patriotic, God-fearing, tax-paying citizens often gathered around that cross. Not once had any citizen professed to be offended by it.

But the extremely anti-Christian secularists in the Freedom From Religion Foundation now claimed that this long-honored symbol of Christian faith was an insult to all non-Christians. They filed suit to have it banished from that public park.

Judge Vinson's remarks seemed to express a sensitivity to the feelings of the majority of Pensacolans who were proud of their historic cross. But it had to go, he ruled. What he felt about it didn't matter, he said. Nor, evidently, did the will of the people—the rule of democracy—any longer seem to matter. That cross had to be removed because "it's the law."

Really? When did "freedom of religion" in our nation's Constitution

morph into "freedom from religion"? Who can identify a single writer of the U.S. Constitution who thought he was penning a prohibition of expressions of faith in public places? The judge who decided to bulldoze the cross acknowledged this. So how did "the law" somehow get turned on its head?

When Columnist Todd Starnes was reporting this legal tiff about that Pensacola cross, he described Freedom From Religion's spokesperson Annie Gaylor as "the organization's perpetually offended co-founder."

What will it take to tell America's judges and legislators and school officials that if they are worried about citizens being offended, they might want to start paying attention to our nation's Christian majority?

We are becoming increasingly offended by their knee-jerk rulings that ban any public expression of our faith. How can we convince them that they need to start factoring our growing outrage into their decisions?

All across China their atheistic government has flattened hundreds of churches and removed crosses on others. If Judge Vinson is right that in America now "it's the law," will our steeples and chapels be the next to go? 

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## The Wrong Way to Do It

In her daily “Welcome Pardner” e-blast, my friend DJ Stubben told us she was reading Steve Harvey’s book *Act Like a Success, Think Like a Success*.

I haven’t seen a copy of that book, but I trust DJ’s take on it. She was intrigued by Harvey’s statement that financial wizard Warren Buffett won’t consider doing business with anyone unless they have failed at least twice in business. Harvey says, “This is how we learn.”

What an interesting hoop to jump through! Have you ever considered failure to be a positive way to learn?

As I pondered this idea, I started realizing that Buffett may not be its strongest endorsement. This insight pops up over and over in the Bible.

Take the apostle Paul, for instance. Would he ever have become the Bible’s strongest advocate for grace if he had not begun as “the chief of sinners”? His atrocious mistakes switched on a bright light he might never have seen without them.

Ditto for the apostle Peter. Instead of ending his career as chief spokesman for Jesus, his profane denials of the Lord taught him—as nothing else could—that “Christ died for sinners.”

I don’t know enough about

Warren Buffet to know if he reads and believes the Bible. If he does, he could find an impressive list of examples to make his point about the benefits of failure.

Surely he would include King David. After that usually wise ruler got into bed with his neighbor’s wife, he would later tell the whole world, “My sin is always before me.” What do you think? Did his public disgrace finally make him a wiser, kinder king?

Moses had to become a murderer and spend four decades as a fugitive in the desert before he was ready to lead God’s people to the Promised Land.

Most of us have heard the probably spurious tale about the frustration Thomas Edison’s wife voiced when his two hundredth attempt to produce an incandescent light bulb didn’t work. She fussed at him for wasting his time. “It’s not wasted, dear,” he is said to have replied. “Now I know two hundred ways not to do it.”

Most of us can recall our worst mistakes. We’d give anything to take back a word, to remake a choice, to undo a deed. Instead of wallowing in regret, maybe we need to adopt Buffett’s and Edison’s view. Now we know how not to do it. *CA*

“The one who keeps God’s commands lives in him, and he in them.”



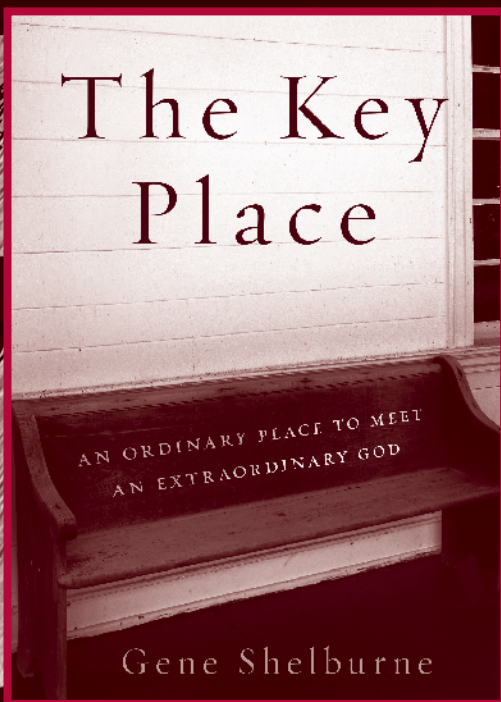
*The Apostle John*  
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