

YOU SHALL KNOW  
THE TRUTH

*VOLUME FOUR*

ESSAYS BY GENE SHELBURNE

THE CHRISTIAN  
**Appeal**



## YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

**M**ost of us would breathe Amen to pastor/poet J. Elliott Corbett's lament that "truth is a lonely hermit, / and falsehood has many friends." And, sadly, it's not just the bad boys and loose girls who spread falsehood. Even without intending to, all of us get things wrong at times, so the ideas we endorse turn out to be untrue. In his latest series of essays, Senior Editor Gene Shelburne reminds us of just how blessed we are to belong to a Lord who was never wrong—One who could say without apology, "I am the Truth."

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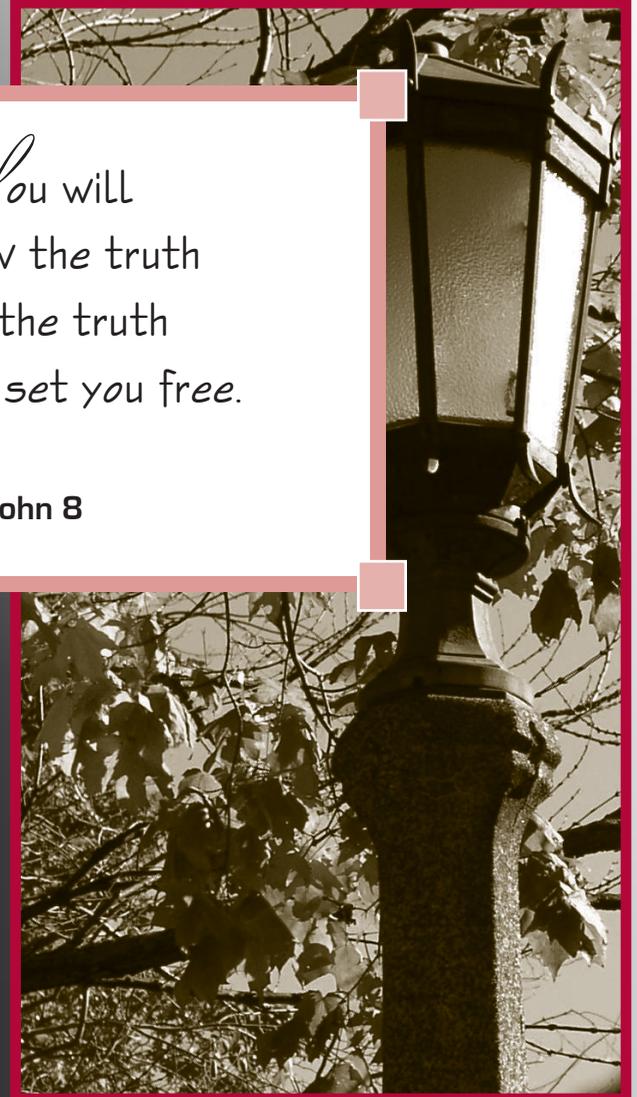
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*You will  
know the truth  
and the truth  
will set you free.*

✿ John 8



Curtis Shelburne

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## *The True Church*

**D**o you realize that 2015 was the three hundredth anniversary of an official writing of the name Plymouth Rock, the Puritans' first New World home? This name first appeared in 1715 in a surveying record.

My late friend and co-laborer Dr. Thomas Langford was an expert in early American literature. He knew what those early settlers really thought and wrote. So Tom often lamented that our stereotypes of the Puritans distort what they actually believed and taught.

No doubt my friend had read almost every word written by American humorist Charles Farrar Browne. You may recognize him by his pen name, Artemus Ward. His brilliant satire appeared in publications such as *The London Punch Letters*.

In 1866 Ward quipped, "The Puritans nobly fled from a land of despotism to a land of freedom, where they could not only enjoy their own religion, but prevent everybody else from enjoying his."

To those who have been drawn and quartered by the Keepers of Purity in any religious body, Ward's humor may not be too funny.

On a tip from my friend Bill Brian, I just finished reading *Out of the Flames* by Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone. It chronicles those

hellish Reformation years when believers all across Europe jailed, tortured, and killed each other in the name of Christ.

To escape the smoke and blood of the Inquisition and the violent clash in England between Protestants and what they called Papists, hundreds of Christians booked passage to America.

Some of those early colonists crossed the ocean in search of wealth, of course. But a substantial number of them sailed west to get away from atrocities such as John Calvin's stake burning of Michael Servetus or the massacre of untold thousands of Huguenots.

Artemus Ward's jest was only too true. Many of those who sought freedom of faith in American colonies didn't believe in freedom. They just wanted to be allowed to serve God their way. Which, they were convinced, was the only right and permissible way.

If Thanksgiving in America causes us to recall the history of the Puritan pilgrims, perhaps it also should remind us of how they treated dissenters like Roger Williams. Perhaps it should alert us to the ugly attitudes and policies that seem to emerge whenever any band of Christians decides that they alone are the true church. 

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## *Signs of Ice*

**S**herlock Holmes probably would be proud of me. After first jumping to a false conclusion, I slowly put together enough facts to uncover the truth. I think.

For two or three years I had been troubled to see that the Okies got it right while we Texans fouled up.

That's hard for a Texas boy to admit, but it was obvious. All over Texas, sprouting like dandelions, highway signs popped up. TX DOT kept warning us, "Bridge May Ice in Cold Weather." Duh! Not in July?

But in Oklahoma all the warning signs said what the Texans really meant: "Bridge Ices Before Road."

Then, just as I prepared to hang my head and concede one to the Okies, my lady and I drove the thousand-plus miles to east Tennessee. In at least three states we saw the more precise signs before every bridge.

It wasn't the Okies that outdid us. It was the feds!

But that wasn't all. When I spotted random instances of the original redundant ice-in-cold-weather signs on I-40 in Arkansas and Tennessee, suddenly I realized that the original sign-writing goof was made by some fed in Washington and not by a fellow-Texan.

"It's elementary, dear Watson," Sherlock would have scolded me.

Now it all began to make sense.

Who besides the feds would force all the states to waste megabucks to tell drivers what all of them should know before they get a license?

Bridges do get icy. Wasting millions of dollars on signs won't change that.

The same folks who write IRS rules and EPA regulations worded those needless signs—both the signs that say it concisely and the ones that insult us about ice in July. Texas just installed a jillion of the bad ones first.

I wonder now if that same sign-writer swapped jobs and taught the U.S. weather people to issue "Significant Weather" alerts. Is there any other kind?

Redundancy is not always bad, of course. Sometimes it's artful. It's on purpose.

When the apostle Paul says, "The free gift of God is salvation in Christ Jesus," for example, he's making an important point.

Five times in three verses in Romans 5 he refers to our salvation as a "free gift." What other kind of gift is there? an English teacher might ask.

And Paul might answer, "The kind of gift some misguided Christians think they can earn by being good enough, right enough, generous enough to deserve it."

Not so, Paul insists. This gift really is a gift. It's free. 

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## *Scurriers*

No mongrel was ever better loved than Bootsie. He was our family mutt for most of my growing-up years.

We repeated that bit of canine history all the years my own kids were at home. Their border collie/multiple ancestry pooch somehow got named Ringy. No pup ever got loved more or spoiled more rotten.

All of my life I have loved animals. Nothing I write here should imply otherwise. But it does trouble me to see so many in this generation blurring the biblical lines between humans and the other creatures on earth.

When I read in FoxNews, for example, about a “dog *who* outran a New York City commuter train” and was rescued, that choice of pronouns alerts me to the subtle shift in how many modern folks view our world.

When Bible translators can’t decide whether to use “who” or “what” to describe the animal Jephthah vowed to offer to God, their confusion might be attributed to the way the story turned out. But Jephthah himself clearly did not expect a “who” to come out of his door.

Is this same human/animal confusion latent in the recent headline that says a deadly alligator was “euthanized”? We used to “put down” or “kill” animals and debated about “euthanizing” human beings, didn’t we?

Animals certainly got exalted above their traditional status when PETA members ranted against the White House Easter egg roll. The protesters seemed to be flummoxed about the poor hens who had to lay all those eggs. Folks at Tyson Foods hear far worse yowling than that by the chicken advocates of this age.

I doubt the reporter who wrote about rabid skunks at Perryton, Texas, meant to join the ranks of the animal adorers when she referred to “positive skunks.” Having had multiple run-ins with those smelly creatures, however, I smiled at her description.

As I was reading the first chapters of Genesis in the New Living Translation today, I kept encountering the description of four-footed critters as “all the animals that scurry along the ground.” I’ve always been fascinated by the menagerie of scurriers God made.

The Bible story of creation depicts all non-human creatures as the handiwork of God. He himself said from the beginning that they were good. Since he made them to feed us and work for us, we value and care for them.

But the Bible account makes it crystal clear: only humans were made in God’s image. The whole system goes haywire when the scurriers outrank people. 

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## *The Problem with No Problem*

“No problem,” the friendly young adult replied when I thanked him for holding open the bank’s door and letting me exit before he came in.

His kind reply hit me wrong. Thankfully, I was able to keep from snapping back that I wouldn’t have let him assist me if I’d thought it was some kind of problem.

As I ambled toward my car, I scolded myself. “Old man,” I silently mumbled, “you’ve got to learn that today this is the idiom of almost anybody under thirty. When they say ‘no problem,’ they mean to be polite, not offensive.” But it still hits me wrong. Every time.

Later that same week I learned that a fellow-pastor in our town, Jimmy Evans, reacts to “no problem” the same way I do. I’m glad to have a partner in umbrage, Jimmy, but I’m afraid this says more about you and me than it does about them. It just means we’re not as young as we used to be. You and I learned to say, “You’re welcome!” a long time before these kids were born.

My kids and grandkids have a tough task on their hands, but slowly they’re educating their white-haired patriarch. While son Jon and I roamed around Florida last fall, we talked about stuff like this.

I was surprised to find that even

a spit-and-polish Marine officer like him does not share my generation’s immediate negative reaction to garish tattoos and facial piercings. Most folks his age evidently don’t even notice such adornments. I’m trying to teach myself to look past them too. But I’m a slow learner.

I remember my father’s reaction to facial hair on any young man. It’s a good thing he got to heaven before these Duck Dynasty days. He had trouble controlling his blood pressure even before all the beards sprouted.

My guess is that this kind of surface reaction has challenged every generation since they closed Eden. Eve probably fussed because Cain thought he needed store-bought cotton britches instead of homemade fig leaves.

All of us who love God need to practice looking at other people the way he does. The Bible tells us that when he looks at us, he doesn’t see what humans tend to see. We look at people’s external trappings, but God focuses on the inside. He looks at our hearts.

That young fellow who held the door for me that day obviously respected older folks. His smile radiated a loving spirit. He was doing exactly what my parents taught me to do. So the words he spoke should have been no problem. 

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## Tongue Tones

“All English majors have to take this advanced grammar course,” they told me when I was registering for graduate classes at the nearby university.

I protested. By then I was a newspaper columnist, and I been editing a magazine for a dozen-plus years. I thought I should be teaching grammar, not learning it.

In the decades since, I have been forever grateful that the English department head, Dr. Pat Sullivan, did not budge on this. His “grammar” course turned out to be a linguistics study that has blessed me ever since.

He taught me not just to see words, but to listen to them as well. For example, some of us who lubricate our cars “greeze” them. Others “greece” them. I learned that people who use the “z” sound either grew up south of the Mason-Dixon line, or had relatives who did.

Ever since that class, I’ve been hearing words and wondering where newscasters and preachers and clerks at Walmart learned to pronounce them that way.

The TV news gal last night used the word “tour.” She pronounced it “tore” instead of “toor,” as I do.

When our weather gurus predicted snow flurries, one said “flooories,” the other called them “fluhrries.” To tell us

what would happen “during” that storm, one pronounced it “*duhring*.” Like most West Texans, the other said “*dyoorring*.” Was I hearing regional accents?

When you pronounce “zero,” do you say “zee-roh” or “zeh-roh”? I’m hearing both. Likewise, I hear one TV personality telling us something has been “*vuhrrified*” when a guy on another channel says “*vehrrified*.” Which one is right?

Varied sounds often catch my ear when people say words that contain “ul.” Some say “multiply” making it rhyme with “pull.” Others make it rhyme with “hull.” If you listen, you’ll hear these same options when people say “culture” or “adult.” And I’ve even heard a highly educated person saying “multiply” with a cow’s “moo” sound. Maybe echoing a foreign heritage?

I pay attention to these variations not to be critical. I listen because I’m curious. Because it’s fun.

More serious, though, are the sounds that identify us theologically. Just as accent may identify a Yankee or a Georgian, vocabulary will often distinguish a believer from an unbeliever. And we may even learn to sort out different brands of Baptists or Lutherans or Church of Christ folks by listening to their subtle word choices.

Jesus warns us, “Be careful how you listen.”

CA

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## Fake News Not New

Although fake news has surfaced in this decade as a devious way for biased journalists in the Obama / Trump era to sway elections, fabricated news reports actually are far from new.

Today we have no clue why they did it, but way back in 1835 the *New York Sun* published a series of articles about alleged discoveries by a highly acclaimed British astronomer, Sir John Herschel.

Misrepresented as reprints from the *Edinburgh Journal of Science* (a made-up title for a publication that didn’t exist), the articles claimed to contain Herschel’s description of winged humanoids he had spotted on the moon with his new state-of-the-art telescope.

“We counted three parties of these creatures walking erect in a small wood,” the article quoted the famous Brit. “They averaged about four feet in height, were covered, except on the face, with short and glossy copper-colored hair.” The sham article went on to describe the moonwalking creatures as having yellow-hued faces somewhat like an orangutan’s.

Why would any responsible newspaper publisher fabricate such a wild bit of fiction and print it as the truth? Was this an elaborate April Fool’s joke? Or was it the *Sun*’s clever way of exposing the lack of

professionalism in their competitors, who did rush to reprint the fake articles without checking their genuineness?

While some fake news does consist of calculated lies designed by charlatans to deceive voters or customers or fans, some of it is the result of honest mistakes.

We rightly honor President Andrew Jackson, for example, as the only White House occupant who ever paid off our nation’s debt. So we grant him a bit of wiggle-room when he issues dumb pronouncements based on his firm belief that Earth is flat.

Journalists and judges and professors and preachers with strong biases can be expected to spout errors that reflect their bias. They don’t mean to lie. For them the world really is flat (or the climate really is changing, or all Republicans really are Neanderthals, or the only people who believe the Bible belong to their brand of church).

In this age of fake news, some days I feel like Isaiah when he moaned, “Truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found.”

In contrast, the same prophet foretold of Jesus, “No deceit was found in his mouth.” How refreshing to have a Lord who can factually claim, “I am the truth.” CA

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## *Truth in Error*

I chuckled out loud when, two or three years ago, I spotted the typo in AOL's news-teaser line that told us, "Southeast Asian Nations Vow To Intensify Efforts To Rescue Migrants Stranded at See."

Of course, I knew what they meant to write, but the unintended truth of what showed up in print was dazzling. We have produced a generation of humans who indeed are "stranded at see." They spend every waking hour with their eyes glued to some sort of screen.

Like the clean-cut family of four who sat across from me at McDonald's last week. Both parents and both kids—the youngest still a pre-schooler—sat at their table thumb-punching cell phones or iPads. I don't think they exchanged half a dozen words in half an hour. They were stranded at see.

Like the young driver in the left-turn lane next to me just a while ago. She was so busy texting that she never knew when the turn arrow lit up and the half dozen cars in front of her zipped through the intersection. Nobody behind her made it. Like her, all of them were stranded at see.

Were you as surprised and disappointed as I was to see the latest stats on how many hours a day the average American spends watching

TV? Add to that the time many of those same people are forced to spend every day at work in front of a computer screen, and it becomes clear that we are indeed a people stranded at see.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not some kind of Luddite who thinks we'd be holier folks if we could turn back the communication clock to use smoke signals or party lines. But I do fear that our present visual obsessiveness may block us from contemplating important truths and realities that are unseen and unseeable.

One deadly source of sinfulness, according to the apostle John, is "the lust of the eyes." Sin first invaded our universe when Eve "saw" that the fruit Satan had pointed out to her looked good.

Now that our culture baptizes itself in daily doses of public pornography, hardly a day passes without a new headline about some teacher or priest or preacher who got caught having sex with a kid. The apostle Peter would say that these perps have "eyes full of adultery." In a truly sad sense, they have been stranded at see.

The biblical writer of Hebrews suggests a workable solution for all this when he says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus." 

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## *Pop Klaus and the Thief*

Mom and Pop Klaus were the only names I ever knew them by. When my family moved to Amarillo in 1953, this hardy couple with a heavy Scandinavian accent lived across the vacant lot just north of us.

We soon learned that the Klauses owned and ran several A&W Root Beer stands in our town. He worked long, hard hours in this thriving enterprise.

One Saturday afternoon, Pop Klaus showed up on our front porch and rang our doorbell—a most unusual event. We usually dinged his!

"Is Gene free tonight?" Pop asked my surprised mother. Then he explained, "One of my workers quit this morning. Can Gene fill in for him tonight?"

Pop had no idea how much his request thrilled me. I was just fourteen at the time, but I'd already held half a dozen jobs and loved all of them. Now here was a paying job in our new town. Wow!

It didn't take me long that night to catch on to the specialized skill of filling ice-covered heavy glass mugs with root beer. I filled dozens of mugs for the carhops, and funneled their burger orders to the cook, and made change for them to give to their drive-in customers.

We stayed busy. Every minute. All evening long. And everything

seemed to go smoothly until Pop switched off the outside lights and tallied up the cash drawer. On the first count, it was twenty dollars short. So he sorted through the cash again. Still short.

As we drove back to our neighborhood late that night, Pop was in a sour mood. The opposite of his usual jolly-elf persona. He never accused me outright, but it was obvious that he thought his new worker—like so many before me—had tapped the till that night.

Pop never asked me to work for him again. But one afternoon several months later, he showed up again on our front porch. Mom answered the doorbell, and Pop told her, "I need to talk to Gene." She summoned me from my bedroom hang-out.

"I owe you an apology," Pop said rather sheepishly. "That night when you worked for me and we came up short in the cash drawer, I know that you knew I blamed you. But I was wrong. Today when we tore out that old order shelf, stuck to the root beer dribbled behind the cash drawer we found that twenty dollar bill."

I never saw a finer example of humility or honesty than when Pop Klaus stood there with regret etched on his face and told me, a kid, "I had to come tell you that." 

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## Bring on the Sisters

If you're a serious Bible reader, you probably have a favorite version of the Bible. I certainly do. But that doesn't mean we don't sometimes check out others.

For more than a year now, whenever I've been doing serious prep for preaching or teaching, I have read the pertinent Bible texts in the New Living Translation.

Don't confuse the NLT with the original Living Bible. As the LB editors confessed, that older version was a paraphrase, not a translation.

The newer NLT is a high-quality Bible version crafted by top-notch scholars. When I compare its simple everyday readings to the archaic verbiage in most other standard texts, I come away feeling blessed by it.

One decision of the NLT translators, though, bothers me over and over. In text after text those NLT scholars bowed to modern gender sensitivities. A good example? In every case where Acts or the apostles refer to "brothers" in church leadership, the NLT committee changed it to read "brothers and sisters."

Now don't misunderstand what I'm writing here. I am not saying Yea or Nay to the pro-or-anti-feminine positions of our day. I'm referring to the decision of a responsible Bible translation team to change the actual

wording of the holy Scriptures to reflect modern views.

That bothers me. Not because I want to demote or restrict Christian women. Without our gifted, totally dedicated ladies, the best ministries of my congregation (and most of the others I know about) could not be done.

But when I open my Bible to see what the Lord says on any subject, I want to read exactly what Paul or John or Luke wrote about it—not what somebody today thinks they should have written.

I realize now that in the past two or three centuries, Bible translators tried a similar strategy to adapt to the changing culture of their time. When the original Bible writers talked about slaves, most of our older English translations changed that to "servants"—a kinder, more popular term in keeping with practices of that day.

The insertion of "sisters" into the NLT text doesn't negate what it otherwise does so well. But what if the next translation team decides to accommodate current practices by substituting "living together" for "marriage," or by using alternate terms to soften the Bible's presently clear restrictions on sexual perversions?

I want a Bible that has been translated, not one that has been edited. What about you? 

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## Verbal Bloopers

All of us (such as preachers or journalists) whose jobs require us to spout streams of words know that we don't always say what we mean to. Our flubs at times can be embarrassing. Sometimes they're hilarious.

How red-faced do you suppose the AP headline writer was who wrote: "Fake plague placed at University"? I'm sure she meant "plague," but that "g" crept in.

I chuckled at the ambiguous AP headline that told us: "Officers Shoot Man with Weapon." That's what most cops shoot people with, isn't it?

Should we blame the spell-checker instead of the FoxNews journalist who reported that a Chesapeake Bay fisherman discovered a two-year-old blue crab that had two six-month-old oysters growing on its shell. The news story told us about "this unusual *siting*." Where else would we more likely find such sea creatures?

It was also FoxNews that a year or so ago relayed the sad news that two elementary school girls got shot at a picnic. This happened, the journalist told us, when "a car opened fire." Is this the latest innovation in self-driving Teslas?

Where is the wordsmith who hasn't stumbled into a double negative? Like the one in that news

story about two women in a PT Cruiser who, back in September 2011, drove around Hartford, Connecticut, passing a batch of counterfeit bills, all of them bearing the same serial number.

The headline writer told the world that these gals passed "bogus counterfeit bills." The story that followed made it clear that the bills really were fake, but that was not what the headline implied. "Bogus counterfeit" means *not* counterfeit, doesn't it?

Verbal miscommunications are nothing new. Did you see the actual headlines that lamented: "Teacher Strikes Idle Kids," or "Miners Refuse to Work after Death," or "Local School Dropouts Cut in Half," or "Panda Mating Fails, Veterinarian Takes Over"?

My journalist buddies could probably dredge up equally laughable oral *faux pas* uttered by teachers or pulpiteers. If we open our mouths or start pecking our keyboards, unintended messages come tumbling out.

Those of us who must generate floods of words in our professions do well to be humble. "The more you talk," the wise man warned, "the more likely you are to sin" (Proverbs 10:19). "A truly wise person," he admonished, "uses few words" (17:27). 

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## Scammers

“Is this Gene Shelburne?” the unfamiliar voice inquired on my cell phone. Although I know not to do it, reflexively I answered, “Yes.”

“I’m calling for the Internal Revenue Service to warn you . . .” If I had not hung up, the scammer would have gone on to tell me that unless I sent them a money order (or a gift card, or some other prepaid piece of plastic), federal agents would soon show up to arrest me.

Most of us nowadays recognize the scare tactics of a scam artist. We know to hang up. But police tell us that one sweet lady in our town sent the bad boys two thousand dollars last week. It’s disgusting that these crooks target the most vulnerable who can least afford it.

When my cell phone rang just now, it was at least the sixth call I’ve received in recent days from a gang of crooks who say they want to sell me warranty coverage for my vehicle (which is still under factory warranty).

My caller ID says these scam calls are coming from the nearby town of Borger, but that’s a small lie to cover up the larger one. I suspect the calls actually originate in Nicaragua or Indonesia, or somewhere in between. The callers’ English certainly is not West Texan.

Why do they think I would do

business with a stranger who starts off by lying about who they are and where they live?

Sometimes I feel like the prophet Isaiah, who wailed, “Truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is nowhere to be found” (59:14-15). I used to think Jeremiah was just being cynical when he wrote, “Truth has perished; it has vanished” (7:28), but maybe his diagnosis was on target.

Everywhere we look today somebody seems to be trying to deceive us. If it’s not fake news, it’s fake product claims on bedtime TV ads or fake brand names on designer clothes or jewelry.

Of course, deception really is nothing new. It was Satan’s ploy in Eden. The Bible tells us he is the father of all lies and of all liars. Knowing this doesn’t make the lies any more palatable, but it does help us tag the spiritual DNA of the liars who try to scam us.

Every generation has had its share of snake oil merchants and flimflam artists—even on Wall Street, or in the White House, or in high-visibility pulpits. How refreshing it is to deal with a what-you-see-is-what-you-get person whose integrity is unquestionable—someone whose complete honesty honors the Lord who affirms, “I am the Truth.” *CA*

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## The Sins of the Father

Have you read the Bible story about Achan? He’s that guy who swiped some goodies after the walls of Jericho crumbled. For his greed, he died. And his wife and kids got buried under the same rocks that killed him.

The same thing happened to the family of Korah. When he dared to launch a revolution against the leadership of Moses, God opened up a sinkhole that swallowed the rebel and his family and his slaves and all his stuff.

I grew up reading these stories and, based on them, just assumed that a wicked man’s family were always doomed to pray the price of his sins. So I was delighted, relieved, and more than ready to accept the explanation one of my Bible teachers gave me for Ezekiel 18:20.

Now God had changed his mind, this teacher told me. And the Lord used the dry-bones prophet to proclaim: “The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him.”

That’s how it ought to be, I thought. That’s the Christian way to deal with guilt. At the time I didn’t realize that this had always

been God’s way to punish sinners. Somehow I had overlooked what God said in Moses’ book: “Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin” (Deuteronomy 24:16).

God has always dealt fairly with sin. Having failed to read my Bible closely enough, I had failed to factor in the fact that the God-defying sins of Achan and Korah fell into a category that deserved special punishment.

What started me thinking about all of this again was the news report that Osama bin Laden’s son had married the daughter of the hijacker who piloted the first suicide plane to hit the WTC towers on 9/11.

FoxNews writer Katherine Lam probably got it right when she called this “a match made in Hell.”

But my first gut-level reaction was that just because his daddy was so evil doesn’t mean the kid is a devil.

Then I heard that all the son’s kin had been pleading with him to leave their bloody past behind, but this son of Osama has vowed, “I am going to avenge my father.” And he publicly urges Al-Qaeda sympathizers to wage war against cities such as Washington and Paris.

It’s tragic, but evidently this apple didn’t fall very far from the tree. *CA*

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## *Bible Bashing*

**D**id you hear about that angry fellow who bashed his girlfriend with a Bible?

The *New York Post* reported that when some dude in the Bronx got into a hot argument with his 41-year-old lover, he grabbed her Bible and “smacked her in the head and shoulder with it.”

At least the Bible-basher picked the right day to do it. It was Sunday. But the cops arrested him anyway and charged him with felony assault.

During my almost eight decades, I’ve witnessed more than my share of Sunday Bible bashing. Sadly, it was done in pulpits by men of the cloth who claimed to represent the God of grace.

I’ll never forget the night when a revival evangelist in our little Kerrville church went berserk. I was only ten years old then, but that angry cleric’s behavior left scars on my soul that are still tender.

Instead of preaching about the Lamb who loved us enough to die for the worst of us, that angry, ugly-mouthed man embarrassed all of us. In the name of God and in defense of “the truth,” that hate-spouting preacher damned our dear Baptist neighbors who sat beside us that night. They had enough sense not to come back.

While reciting reams of Scripture, that red-faced, irate evangelist rudely insulted the congenial Catholic priest who had come to visit our church that night. It was the worst case of Bible-bashing I ever saw.

That one was extreme, to be sure. But Sunday after Sunday all across our land, those who believe the Bible the most have been the most guilty of using it to attack their neighbors.

It amazes me that in a jillion small towns jovial men gather in mom-and-pop cafes to swap jokes, tell tall tales, and laugh together. They thoroughly enjoy each other Monday through Saturday. They really are good friends. But, for an hour or two every Sunday, far too many of them retreat into their bastions of faith (called churches) and use Bible verses to bash each other.

The very Book the bashers use to abuse those who dare to differ with them says, “You must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (Colossians 3:12).

And just a few verses later the apostle tells us, “Live wisely among those who are not believers. Let your conversation be gracious.” That doesn’t sound like Bible-bashing to me. 

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## *Redundancy Repeated*

**O**ne of George Younce’s favorite gospel songs was the one called “Suppertime.” It starts off with George crooning, “When I was but a boy,” and then the line continues, “in days of childhood.”

It’s the kind of redundancy our on-the-ball English teachers taught us to avoid. After all, when is any guy a boy except in his childhood? The songwriter needlessly said the same thing twice.

My best-ever book editor John Hunter saved me from embarrassment when he red-lined a redundant word I had blindly added to the working title of my first book. “The God Who Puts Us Back Together” is the published title, but I had mindlessly tacked on the unnecessary word “again.”

“Back Together Again” said the same thing two times. An English major/lifelong journalist/book editor/professional speaker like me should know better.

Drive across Texas and, as I lamented earlier, every few miles you’ll be confronted with an intelligence-insulting redundancy on the highway signs. Before almost every bridge on a public road the highway department posts a sign that warns us, “BRIDGE MAY ICE IN COLD WEATHER.”

All of us probably need to be

cautioned about possible ice, but what driver with average intelligence needs the last half of that sign message? Do they mean we won’t have to worry about ice in July? Really?

In this wet summer, signs warn us Texas drivers, “ROAD MAY FLOOD.” I’m glad they don’t insult us by adding: “IN WET WEATHER.”

Then there’s the dude who ambles into Home Depot and asks where he can get a hot water heater.

Google defines “redundant” as excessive, useless, unnecessary, and expands the term to describe machinery as well as language. It makes me a tad paranoid when, as a regular occupant of a pulpit, I apply that definition to preaching. But I must confess that too often, at least in my case, it probably applies there.

In defense of us pastors, I quickly point to the parallelism common in most of the biblical psalms. The writer says something one way; then instantly he says it again in different words. And, instead of accusing the psalmist of redundancy, we praise him for his clarity.

My mama used to tell me, “Get it right the first time.” Good advice, whether for boys mowing lawns, or authors writing books, or preachers penning homilies. All of us do well to avoid redundancy. 

# YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

## *The Correct Spelling*

An actor named John Hemming published the first complete collection of Shakespeare's famous plays.

Back in the 1500s when Hemming worked alongside his famous colleague, spelling was far from a precise art. The same word in a lengthy poem or play might be spelled several ways, and nobody would raise an eyebrow.

So it shouldn't surprise us that Hemming seldom spelled his name the same way twice in a row. Sometimes he wrote it Hemminge, or Heminge, or Hemings, or Heminges, or just Heming. Same fellow, but by today's standards, at least half a dozen names.

Can you imagine what kind of static this old Brit would have run into in our digital age when one missing or changed letter can squash a deal? You have to wonder which spelling each of his 13 offspring used.

Mr. Hemming (or whatever his name was) lived in the same era as my aristocratic English ancestors, who spelled their name right (just as I do). Lord Shelburne's name shows up on streets and villages all across the New England and Canadian colonies.

It should not surprise us, though, that some of our cousins on both

sides of the pond make it sound more British by adding an "o" and spelling it "Shelbourne." Others are too lazy to add the final "e". But genealogical studies show that all of us—even those who can't spell—are blood kin.

None of this would matter, I guess, if your last name was Smith or Jones. That would make ancestral studies far more challenging. Forget spelling changes. Only DNA studies can trace accurate family lines.

Whether they are spelled right or wrong, though, names do matter. A lot.

Blessed is the child who gets named after a highly honored ancestor. All of their life that child has something to live up to.

I like the tradition in some Christian cultures that every baby should be given a biblical name. They will never be able to forget their roots.

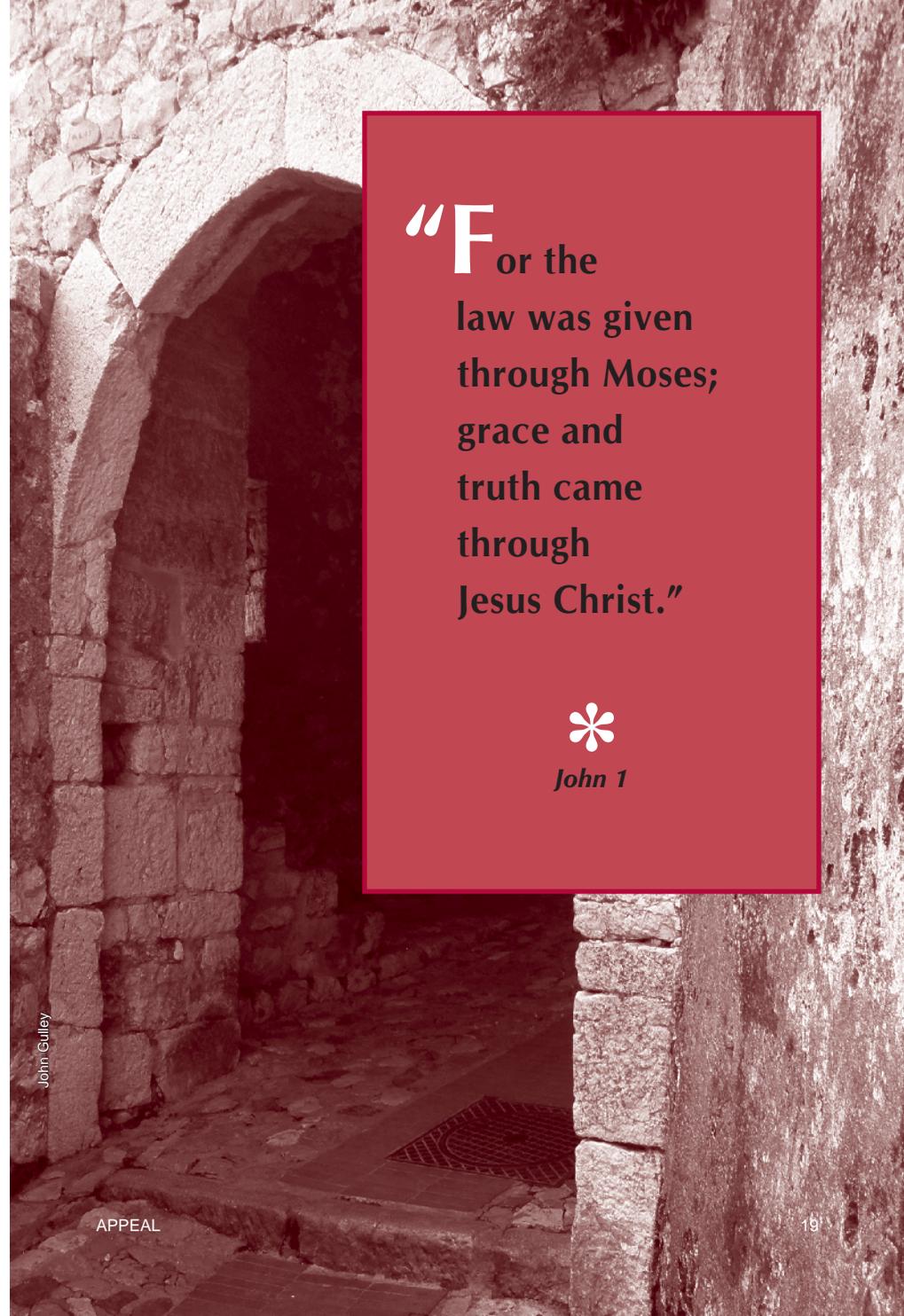
Since the days of Moses, Jewish believers have considered the name of Yahweh too holy to pronounce.

We Christians are taught to honor the name of Jesus because we believe that "no other name is given among men by which we must be saved." Through the centuries the command has not changed: "Do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." 

**"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."**



*John 1*

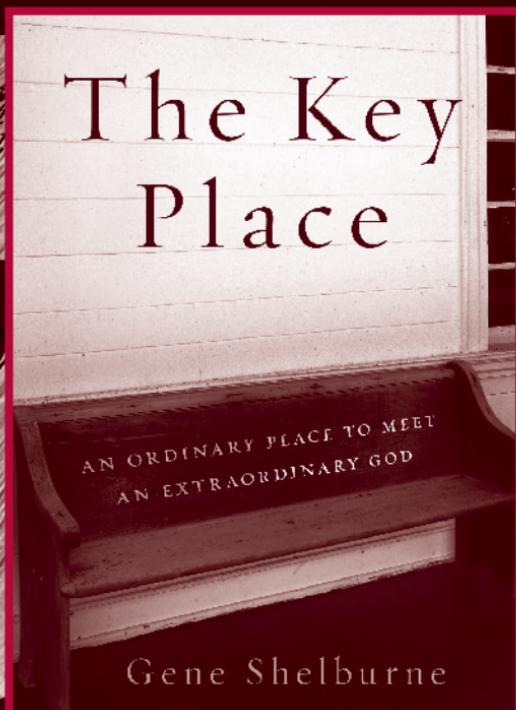


John Guiley

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