

THE BEACON BEAM

November 2021

IN THE PURSUIT OF REFORMATION

What Is Reformation Day All About?

By Robert Rothwell

On October 31, much of the culture will be focused on candy and things that go bump in the night. Protestants, however, have something far more significant to celebrate on October 31. It's Reformation day, which commemorates what was perhaps the greatest move of God's Spirit since the days of the Apostles. But what is the significance of Reformation Day, and how should we consider the events it commemorates?

At the time, few would have suspected that the sound of a hammer striking the castle church door in Wittenberg, Germany, would soon be heard around the world and lead ultimately to the greatest transformation of Western society since the apostles first preached the Gospel throughout the Roman empire. Martin Luther's nailing of his ninety-five theses to the church door on October 31, 1517, provoked a debate that culminated finally in what we now call the Protestant Reformation.

An heir of Bishop Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther is one of the most significant figures God has raised up

since that time. This law student turned Augustinian monk became the center of a great controversy after his theses were copied and distributed throughout Europe. Initially protesting the pope's attempt to sell salvation, Luther's study of Scripture soon led him to oppose the church of Rome on issues including the primacy of the Bible over church tradition and the means by which we are found righteous in the sight of God.

This last issue is probably Luther's most significant contribution to Christian theology. Though preached clearly in the New Testament and found in the writings of many of the church fathers, the medieval bishops and priests had largely forgotten the truth that our own good works can by no means merit God's favor. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, and good works result from our faith, they are not added to it as the grounds for our right standing in the Lord's eyes (Eph. 2:8-10). Justification, God's declaration that we are not guilty, forgiven of sin, and righteous in His sight comes because through our faith alone the Father

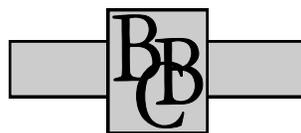
imputes, or reckons to our account, the perfect righteousness of Christ (2 Cor. 5:21).

Martin Luther's rediscovery of this truth led to a whole host of other church and societal reforms and much of what we take for granted in the West would have likely been impossible had he never graced the scene. Luther's translation of the Bible into German put the Word of God in the hands of the people, and today Scripture is available in the vernacular language of many countries, enabling lay people to study it with profit. He reformed the Latin mass by putting the liturgy in the common tongue so that non-scholars could hear and understand the preached word of God and worship the Lord with clarity. Luther lifted the unbiblical ban for the clergy and by his own teaching and example radically transformed the institution itself. He recaptured the biblical view of the priesthood of all believers, showing all people that their work had purpose and dignity because in it they can

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Gregory N. Barkman, *Senior Pastor*
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Robert F. LaTour, *Minister of Families*
Gregory L. Phillips, *Minister of Music*

Sunday

Morning Worship...9:30 AM
Sunday School.....11:10 AM
Evening Worship.....6:00 PM

Wednesday

Prayer Meeting.....7:00 PM
IMPACT Clubs.....7:00 PM
Teen Ministry.....7:00 PM

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serve their Creator.

Today, Luther's legacy lives on in the creeds and confessions of Protestant bodies worldwide. As we consider his importance this Reformation Day, let us equip ourselves to be knowledgeable proclaimers and defenders of biblical truth. May we be eager to preach the Gospel of God to the world and thereby spark a new reformation of church and culture.

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Forerunner of the Reformation

by Burk Parsons

John Wycliffe was the morning star of the Reformation. He was a protestant and a reformer more than a century before Martin Luther ignited the Protestant Reformation in 1517. Through Wycliffe, God planted the seeds of the Reformation, He watered the seeds through John Hus, and He brought the flower of the Reformation to bloom through Martin Luther. The seed of the flower of the German Augustinian monk Luther's 95 theses was planted by the English scholar and churchman John Wycliffe.

Wycliffe died on New Year's Eve, 1384. Three decades later, he was condemned as a heretic. In 1415, the Council of Constance condemned the Bohemian reformer John Hus (c. 1370-1415) and burned him at the stake, and it condemned Wycliffe on 260 counts of heresy. The council ordered that Wycliffe's bones be exhumed, removed from the honored burial grounds of the church, and burned, and his ashes scattered. More than a decade later, the Roman Catholic Church sought to counteract the spreading heresies of Wycliffe and his followers, the Lollards, by establishing Lincoln College, Oxford, under the leadership of Bishop Rich-

ard Fleming. Although the pope could condemn Wycliffe's teachings and scatter his bones, he was unable to stamp out his influence. Wycliffe's ashes were scattered into the River Swift in England's Midlands, and as one journalist later observed: "They burnt his bones to ashes and cast them into the Swift, a neighboring brook running hard by. Thus the brook hath conveyed his ashes into Avon; Avon into Severn; Severn into the narrow seas; and they into the main ocean. And thus the ashes of Wycliffe are the emblem of his doctrine which now is dispersed the world over."

Wycliffe was committed to the authority and inspiration of Holy Scripture, declaring, "Holy Scripture is the highest authority for every believer, the standard of faith and the foundation for reform in religious, political and social life . . . in itself it is perfectly sufficient for salvation, without the addition of customs or traditions." As such, Wycliffe oversaw the translation of the Bible from Latin into the English vernacular. This was a radical undertaking, and it was against the express mandate of the papacy. His understanding of Scripture naturally led to his understanding of jus-

tification by faith alone, as he declared, "Trust wholly in Christ. Rely altogether on his sufferings. Beware of seeking to be justified in any other way than by his righteousness. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for salvation."

In the fourteenth century, at the dawn of the Reformation, Wycliffe shone as a burning and shining light of gospel truth, and his doctrine mirrored his life as one who lived by God's grace and before God's face, *coram Deo*, and for God's glory. *Soli Deo gloria*.

Dr. Burk Parsons is senior pastor of Saint Andrew's Chapel in Sanford, FL, Chief publishing officer for Ligonier Ministries, and editor of *Tabletalk* Magazine. He is author of *Why Do We Have Creeds?*

“GOD AND THE GAY CHRISTIAN”

By Matthew Vines
Convergent Books, 2014

Greg Barkman

Review of Chapter Four,
“The Real Sin of Sodom”, pages 59-75

My article this month is a review of chapter four in a book written to defend the acceptability of “Christian Gays.” I was asked to write this review for “Sharper Iron,” an on-line blog, and completed the task during a trip to Italy that Marti and I were able to enjoy several years ago. I publish it now because the onslaught of attacks upon Biblical teaching by the LBGT community today is both unrelenting and confusing to many Christians. We need to scrutinize arguments like these very carefully so that we be not deceived by clever manipulations.

In chapter four, Vines addresses the first of six Biblical texts dealing with homosexuality. The remaining five are considered in subsequent chapters. Vines’ aim is to demonstrate that none of these passages prohibit committed same-sex relationships. Chapter four analyzes God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as recorded in Genesis nineteen. That Christians have traditionally understood this event to indicate God’s strong disapproval of same-sex relationships is both mistaken and unfortunate according to Vines. He believes that a more careful study demonstrates that the sins of Sodom were inhospitality and violence, not homosexuality.

Vines begins by examining a list of Old Testament texts that mention Sodom, pointing out that none of these explicitly cite same-sex relations as the reason for destruction. He follows with evidence from extra-biblical Jewish literature, drawing the same conclusion. He believes that Sodom’s offenses were lack of hospi-

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tility and attempted gang rape. Next, he briefly examines and explains all negative New Testament references to Sodom, continuing to muster evidence for his premise. Vines claims that no one linked Sodom’s destruction to homosexual behavior until Philo, the first century Jewish historian. He asserts that Philo inaugurated a gradual shift in perceptions, until the destruction of Sodom became linked to homosexuality in the minds of most Christians from about the tenth century onward. But from the beginning, he assures us, it was not so.

Let’s look at two of the New Testament texts Vines employs. He says, “Second Peter 2:7 says Lot was ‘greatly distressed’ by the sensual conduct of the wicked’ in Sodom and Gomorrah, but doesn’t specify same-sex behavior.” Which raises the question, if not same-sex behavior, what was the offending conduct of the wicked in Sodom? Peter describes

“sensual conduct”, “lawless deeds,” and “the lust of defiling passion” (ESV). He tells us that this behavior “greatly distressed” Lot, and that “he was tormenting his righteous soul” day after day, by the deeds which “he saw and heard.” This does not describe an occasional episode of gang rape whenever a stranger happened to arrive in town. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that outsiders would ever venture into Sodom if their practice of gang rape was as habitual as the behavior described by Peter. Furthermore, Vines wants us to believe that this gang-rape style violence had nothing to do with sexual attraction, but was actually aggressive dominance designed to humiliate and subjugate enemies. If so, why does Peter describe it as “sensual conduct” and “the lust of defiling passion”? No, what Peter reports was daily, sensual, lawless, passionate, and defiling. Peter’s square peg of lasciviousness cannot be forced into the round hole of inhospitality and violence. It doesn’t fit. Lot clearly witnessed defiling sexual conduct that best fits the traditional understanding of sodomy.

The second New Testament text to examine is Jude 7, which states, “as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire” (NKJV). Here is what Vines says about “strange flesh” (sarkos heteras, different flesh). “Far from arguing that the men of Sodom pursued flesh too similar to their own, Jude indicts them for pursuing flesh that was too different. In fact, the phrase ‘strange flesh’ likely

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refers to the attempted rape of angels instead of humans” (p. 69). I find it difficult to believe that “strange flesh” refers to angels, since the men of Sodom clearly did not know that Lot’s two visitors were, in fact angels. By every appearance, they were human males. The Sodomites were not pursuing sex with angels. They were demanding sexual relations with what they believed were men. The passage has long been understood to mean that the men of Sodom desired “different flesh” from the standpoint of unnatural intercourse with men rather than women. Most men desire sex with women. From the viewpoint of normal human behavior, men having sex with women is natural. The Sodomites wanted “different flesh,” namely other men. That is what was “strange” or “different.” Vines’ attempt to turn the obvious upside down may be clever, but it doesn’t stand up to scrutiny.

Perhaps we should examine some of Vines’ other assertions. At the beginning of chapter four, he reports a conversation with his Father about Sodom. “They wanted to have sex with other men, so God destroyed them,” says Mr. Vines, echoing the traditional Christian viewpoint. But the problem, according to Vines, is that “he didn’t know any gay couples, so he tended to read any Biblical references to same-sex behavior as sweeping statements about homosexuality itself” (p. 59). Over time, we are assured, Vines’ father became more nuanced in his understanding. He gradually realized that there is a difference between gay people who desire promiscuous sex, something the Bible forbids, and gay people who desire a committed relationship, something which, according to Vines, the Bible does not condemn.

But let’s rewrite this discussion with a slight twist and see what happens. Suppose Mr. Vines said, “They insisted on indulging in pro-

miscuous adultery, so God shut them out of His Kingdom” (I Corinthians 6:9). And suppose Matthew responded, “But he didn’t know any people involved in loving, committed, long-term adulterous relationships.” Would anyone agree that there is a category of habitual adulterers who are not excluded from God’s Kingdom because they are committed to only one adulterous partner?

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That’s the distinction Vines wants us to accept regarding homosexuals.

Furthermore, Vines claims that because inhospitable behavior and violence were sins of Sodom, same-sex activity was not. The fact that God chides Sodom for behavior other than same-sex relations proves, at least to Vines, that He does not condemn their homosexuality. “But no biblical writers suggested that the sin of Sodom was primarily or even partly engaging in same-sex behavior” (p. 69). Or again, “But the Bible never identifies same-sex behavior as the sin of Sodom, or even as a sin of Sodom” (p. 75). On the contrary, students of the Bible, who have no personal stake in defending homosexuality, understand that the primary cause of Sodom’s destruction was

rampant homosexual conduct.

To support his unusual interpretations of Scripture, Vines finds it necessary to posit a sharp distinction between same-sex attraction and same-sex activity. He claims that virtually all references to same-sex behavior in the Bible refer to those who did not possess same-sex attractions. They were mostly heterosexual men who engaged in homosexual relations for various reasons, but not, like gay men today, because they could not be satisfied with women. For this reason, Vines argues that everything the Bible says to condemn homosexual activity does not apply to modern gay people, only to heterosexuals who acted against their natural desires. Gay people whose sexual attraction is exclusively homosexual were unknown to the ancients, and consequently, they had nothing to say about them. That seems a little too convenient to me, but it also raises a number of questions. Are some people born today with exclusive same-sex attractions? If so, were people not born that way in centuries past? Vines would answer, Yes. That begs the question, why are some born like that today and not in Bible days? What has changed in the nature of humanity over the centuries? If, on the other hand, it is conceded that some people have always been born this way, then why were the ancients unaware of them, and how can we be sure they did not have them in mind when they wrote against same-sex relations? Vines backs himself into a corner because he wants to have it both ways. Either the Bible does include so called gay people when it condemns same-sex activity, or else modern gays are a brand new type of humanity that did not exist before now. If that be true, two problems arise. Number one, how does Vines know that God does not condemn this “modern” form of homosexuality? He can only hope this is true, but he has no way to know it, if, as he

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claims, this category of people did not exist in Bible days. The Bible would not condemn something that, if Vines claim be accepted, did not exist when the Bible was written. Secondly, why is there a category of “gays” today that did not exist in Bible days? Where did they come from? How and why did they arise? How does Vines or anyone know they did not exist prior to modern days? Where does he obtain the proof of this fascinating, but all too fictional-appearing claim? Why should anyone accept this claim as anything other than a thinly disguised convenience to avoid the Bible’s clear denunciation of same-sex relationships? This is a conundrum of Vines own making, and he will not easily extract himself from the horns

of this dilemma.

Matthew Vines’ book is a clever assault upon the authority and integrity of Scripture. It is a masterful attempt to make the Bible mean the opposite of what it says. Let God be true, and every man a liar, even if that man is a winsome and attractive Bible-quoting professing Christian.

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Our culture doesn’t like negativity—and the Bible teaches us to respect people and not to be arrogant or argumentative. But as children need loving parental warnings about dangerous roads or drugs, young Christians need protection from damaging error. Paul took no pleasure in this. He warned these Ephesians “with tears”, heartbroken at discovering the lies and exploitation of false teachers. Of course, none of us understand or teach Scripture perfectly. And Christians will always debate and disagree about secondary details of doctrine. But because people’s salvation is at stake, we must “contend for the faith” with those who distort the gospel, such as “ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ” (Jude 4), or those claiming, contrary to I Corinthians 6:9-11, that unrepentant sexual immorality will not exclude us from God’s kingdom.

Indeed, most New Testament letters contain warnings against false teaching. Sometimes, this was distortion of the religious kind—adding human traditions to biblical faith, like pressure to observe Jewish laws (Galatians 6:12-16), or pressure to accept the human ideology, religious observance and visionary experiences of the false teachers (Colossians 2:8, 16, 18). In other letters, the false teaching was of the liberal kind—*subtracting* culturally unpopular aspects of biblical teaching, such as that God became man (I John 4:1-3). All false teaching is fuelled by Satan, the “father of lies”, and is defeated by the Spirit of truth through sound teaching.

Richard Coekin, *Gospel DNA*

On The Feminine Side

by Marti Barkman

This article, written by Scott Hubbard of Desiring God Ministries, was emailed to me a couple weeks ago by a dear friend, one of so many hundreds of you who are faithfully praying for our sweet daughter Jessica as she goes through cancer treatment. This is the type of article I would likely skim over, giving mental assent to the truth contained within. But on a day like today, when the presence of God is the desperate desire of our hearts, I read with attention to every word. Especially appreciated is the truth from the book of Peter, truth that seems to be waiting around every corner I turn these days! I encourage you to read slowly, carefully, thoughtfully...

In days of darkness, God regularly delivers his comfort and strength to us through four simple words: “I am with you.”

I am with you. The promise comes to God’s fearful people across time and testaments: to Isaac in Beersheba (Genesis 26:24), Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:12), David in the valley (Psalm 23:4), the disciples as he commissions them (Matthew 28:20). The living God knows what we need most in our deepest distress: not answers, but the promise of his presence.

And yet, the power of this promise rises only as high as our knowledge of the one who gives it. The presence of a vague Benevolence is of little help when suffering steals toward us. And so, God not only promises his people that he is with them; he also reminds them of who he is.

When we walk through the valley of deep darkness, defenseless as a sheep, he calls himself Shepherd (Psalm 23:4). When we lie face down, overpowered by enemies too

strong for us, he calls himself Redeemer (Isaiah 43:14). And when we feel small, vulnerable and afflicted in a dangerous world, he calls himself Creator: “Let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (1 Peter 4:19).

Small, vulnerable, and afflicted describes how many must have felt when they received the letter we know as 1 Peter. Already “grieved by various trials,” they did not know where suffering’s shadow would descend next (1 Peter 1:6; 4:12). They were the threefold target of a world that maligned them, a flesh that besieged them, and a devil that stalked them (1 Peter 4:4; 2:11; 5:8).

Into that fear, uncertainty, and pain, Peter speaks a promise. He has already assured them that they are “God’s people,” heirs of the pledge “I am with you” (1 Peter 2:10). Now, he lifts their eyes above their trials, above their enemies, even above all heaven and earth, to remind them that that God who calls them “My people” is also their “faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19).

“Know this, my brothers and sisters,” Peter says in effect, “The God who walks with you, who hems you in behind and before, is not only your Savior, Redeemer, and Lord, but also the Maker of the mountains, the Crafter of the skies.” And for those bought by the blood of Jesus, this Creator is not only mighty, but faithful — even to the smallest, most vulnerable, most afflicted among his people.

If we embrace God as our faithful Creator in our suffering, we will begin to find two unmoving rocks beneath our feet. First, God governs all creation from the highest to the

lowest, from the farthest to the nearest — from the orbits of moons in unseen galaxies to the shadows of leaves in our front yard.

The suffering of Peter’s audience may have seemed frustratingly random. So too with our own suffering: cruel spouses and false “friends,” careening cars and spreading viruses may seem, by all appearances, un-governed: arbitrary menaces in an arbitrary world. But here, Peter reminds us that behind every creature, animate and inanimate, stands a Creator — a Creator so involved in the details of his world that suffering reaches us only if he, in his wisdom and lovingkindness, deems “necessary” (1 Peter 1:6; 3:17).

Just as God says to the seas, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther, and here shall your proud waves be stayed” (Job 38:11), so too he says to our suffering. No slander cuts, no tumor grows, no arrow flies, and no plague spreads a millimeter farther than the Almighty decrees. To each, God says, “Thus far shall you come, and no farther” — and creation is bound to obey.

Suffering can thwart our Creator’s sovereign rule as soon as the sun flies from its course, or the seasons refuse to arrive, or the molecules stop hearing the word of him who upholds the universe (Hebrews 1:3).

God’s sovereignty as Creator extends not only over the creation around us, however, but also over us. Our souls, which often feel so fragile, are in the arms of Omnipotence. And no suffering can reach into those arms to snatch the people God protects.

“By God’s power,” Peter writes,

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“[you] are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5). In all afflictions, fears, sorrows, and uncertainties, the power of God is garrisoned about our souls, guarding and keeping us — not from the suffering itself, but from anything in the suffering that would ultimately destroy us. He is our Creator twice over — once by birth, twice by new birth (1 Peter 1:3, 23) — and he will not forsake the work of his hands.

Such is the power that undergirds the promise at the end of Peter’s letter: “After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (1 Peter 5:10). After we have suffered through the “little while” of this life, our Creator will bend down to the dust once again and put his breath back into the children of man. Then paralyzed legs will walk again, blind eyes will see again, scarred skin will feel again. Then the pieces of every broken heart will be put back together; then will every wound, seen and unseen, be bound up for eterni-

ty. Our Creator has every ability — indeed, every intention — to make all things new, and to place us in a world where suffering has no home.

When you meet the kind of Christians who trust God as their faithful Creator, you will know it. Such saints have a mark they cannot hide. Not only do they walk through suffering with an abiding peace in Jesus; they also walk through suffering with an eye toward others: “Let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

Having entrusted their fragile souls to the safekeeping of a faithful Creator, they have found the courage to pick up the shattered pieces of their lives, hand them to Jesus, and trust that he is still able to take what is broken and use it to nourish multitudes. They may speak comfort with a tremble in their voice, or reach out to another with scarred hands, or serve with wounds that cannot be seen and cannot be fully healed in this life. But they still speak, still reach, still serve, bringing the treasure of God to others in a jar of clay.

Why? Because the Creator of the stars keeps them as the apple of his eye. Because the Architect of the earth counts their every hair. Because the Maker of the mountains holds their souls in the hollow of his hand. And with him they are safe.

Scott Hubbard is a graduate of Bethlehem College & Seminary and an editor for desiringGod.org.

THE BEACON BROADCAST

Monday thru Friday

WITA 1490 AM (Knoxville, TN) 9:30 a.m.
WKBA 1550 AM (Roanoke, VA) 10:00 a.m.
WKPA 1390 AM (Lynchburg, VA) 10:00 a.m.
WBAG 1150 AM (Burlington, NC) 12:15 p.m.
WBAG 105.9 FM (Burlington, NC) 12:15 p.m.
WTRU 830 AM (Winston-Salem, NC) 2:00 p.m.
WDZY 1290 AM (Richmond, VA) 6:15 a.m.
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WDZY 103.3 FM (Richmond, VA) 6:15 a.m.
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WSKY 1230 AM (Asheville, NC) 7:15 a.m.
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WYYC 98.1 FM (York, PA) 5:00 p.m.

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WBAG 1150 AM (Burlington, NC) 10:30 a.m.
WTRU 830 AM (Winston-Salem, NC) 10:30 a.m.
WDRU 1030 AM (Raleigh, NC) 10:30 a.m.
WLES 590 AM (Richmond, VA) 10:30 a.m.
Harbour Light of the Windwards 9:30 p.m.
1400 AM/94.5 FM (Caribbean)
WGNQ mixlr.com/wgng-radio (M-F)
8:45-9 a.m. & 4:45-5:00 p.m.
(Internet station based in Greenville/Washington, NC)

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WXTH-LP 101.7 FM (Richwood, WV) 10:05 a.m.
10:05 p.m.

BEACON HIGHLIGHTS FOR NOVEMBER

CALENDAR

02 Coffee n' Courage
03 IMPACT Clubs
06 Fall Festival
07 *Daylight Saving Time Ends*
 ESL
09 Coffee n' Courage
 Elders/Deacons Meeting
10 IMPACT Clubs
13 Coffee n' Courage (*Saturday*)
14 Members Meeting
 ESL
16 Coffee n' Courage
17 IMPACT Clubs
18 Silver Saints
21 ESL
23 Thanksgiving Praise Service
24-26 *Church Office Closed*
25 Thanksgiving Day
28 ESL

MEMBER BIRTHDAYS

01 Carol Shaw
08 Mary Sue Wright
09 Jane Faucette
10 Duane Burns
13 Rebecca Griffin
 Laura Warner
18 Mary Speight
21 Sue Vestal
22 Joey Beck
 Jeremy Fairchild
25 Frieda King
 Ann Whittington
29 Clara Driver
 Todd Wilson

MISSIONARY BIRTHDAYS

09 Ruth Bixby
 Melanie Webster
10 Sillas Campos
12 Marc Blackwell
23 Judie Blackwell
26 Becca Jensen*
30 Wanger Campos

*Children of Missionaries

*We express our heartfelt
sympathy to the families of:*

Victoria Pope
Mark Spencer

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