

THE Plain Truth

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A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jan - Mar 2018

Dying to live.
P.5

The two sides of grace.
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Mega-faith.
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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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Your True Self

Time flies – we are entering 2018!

While times/seasons come and go, God’s truth about *humanity* is timeless. The Plain Truth’s mission is to share this wonderful truth - to reveal and awaken us to our *True Self*, our true humanity revealed in Christ Jesus.

Because we have lost knowledge of God’s true purpose for us, we are *not* living the abundant life that God created us for – that is, to live His kind of life; a life filled with joy, passion, adventure, creativity and discovery. Instead, we have settled for a mundane, mediocre, fearful, anxious, constrained and shackled life, like a caged/chained eagle in a zoo.

Here is a true story of such an eagle from the National Kruger Park Zoo, in South Africa. After living in the zoo for several years, the eagle got used to her caged life, thinking that that was her real life, anything outside the cage was just an illusion.

One day, the zoo authority, for some reason, decided to set her free. So, they took her to a high hill and released her. They waited to see her take off. But, to their surprise, she refused to fly, even after repeated prodding. Why? This was because she was conditioned to believe that the cage was her home, and there was no life outside that cage. She believed that lie even though she was now free to live her true life and be her true self. Needless to say, the zoo authority was quite disappointed.

Just then, another eagle flew high up in the sky, as though beckoning her to come and fly with her. When the grounded eagle *identified with the soaring eagle*, by simply seeing her own image, she immediately flew to her freedom, never to return again! She *discovered* her true self.

What about us? Like the caged eagle, we too have been conditioned to believe that we are inferior, unworthy, and useless, and that we lack the creativity, talents and abilities to accomplish anything of value or to improve our situation or lot in life.

Only when the shackled eagle identified with her own kind - the soaring eagle, was she awakened to her life of freedom, and able to be her true self. What about us? Scripture tells us we are created in God’s *image and likeness*. That is, we carry His DNA, His blueprint. That alone gives us our true worth, value, dignity, respect and importance. God has endowed each of us with a unique personality, with creativity, talents, gifts and



by
Dr. P. Sellappan

abilities, so that we can use them to edify and enrich the lives of others.

The risen and ascended Christ is our *True Self*, our true humanity, uniquely expressed through our personalities. All the fullness of God dwells in Christ, and Christ shares His fullness with us freely. So, we lack nothing! *What we need is a revelation and an awakening to our True Self, which is the risen Christ in us.* Yes, the *hidden* Christ in us is the hope of our glory. As His Holy Spirit renews our minds and energizes us, we too can soar high like never before. God’s kingdom, which is our inheritance, offers us endless possibilities to explore, to discover, and delight in the truth of who we are as image bearers. Your life in the kingdom will never be the same. And your kingdom life starts now!

Jesus told his disciples, “The kingdom of heaven is like *treasure hidden* in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then *in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field*...the kingdom of heaven is

like a merchant looking for *fine pearls*. When he found one of great value, *he went away and sold everything he had and bought it*.¹

What is Jesus talking about in these parables? He is *referring to the treasure, the pearl of great price – his own image – hidden inside us!* We carry God’s image and likeness, which gives us immense value and worth. Paul also echoes this truth: “...We have this *treasure* in jars of clay [our bodies] to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”² That’s why Jesus endured suffering and poured out his life

(sold everything) to purchase us. The author of Hebrews tells us: “...For the *joy* set before him [Jesus] he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”³ Paul also echoes the same thought: “You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of human beings⁴ ...Don’t you realize that *your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God?* You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price...”⁵

The risen, ascended Christ is our True Self. God believes in us because He sees His own image and likeness in us. He sees the risen, ascended Christ in us. He sees Christ’s perfection, blamelessness, righteousness, beauty and glory in us. Christ is our mirror. That’s why Apostle John tells us, “As He [Christ] is, so are we in this world.”⁶ That makes us truly worthy and valuable. So let’s live our true lives, lives revealed in Christ, and be our True Selves. □



¹ Matthew 13:44-46

² 2 Corinthians 4:7

³ Hebrews 12:2

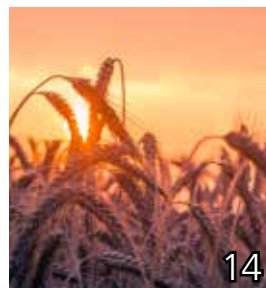
⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:23

⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

⁶ 1 John 4:17

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What our readers say:

Hi! I'm a new reader of the Plain Truth magazine. I'm only fifteen, so I can't send you cheques or money to you. I was just wondering if there is any other alternative way to support your ministry.

**Abraham Sebastian
Taiping**

Ed.: We are delighted to hear from young readers like you. You are probably one of our youngest subscribers. We hope you find The Plain Truth helpful and inspirational. Please don't worry about being unable to support this ministry financially. You can certainly pray that other readers who are financially able would contribute to help sustain this ministry. More importantly, pray that we write good articles – articles that are inspiring, uplifting, and transformational.

Enclosed please find my cheque for RM100 to help defray your printing and other expenses. May I take this opportunity to wish you a Happy and Peaceful New Year.

**Alice Ooi
Petaling Jaya**

Ed.: Thank you for your generous support – greatly appreciated. It sure helps others who are unable to contribute to receive this magazine.

The Plain Truth is very educational and interesting. It provides a deeper knowledge of the Bible. The articles are inspiring and thought provoking. It leads us to the real purpose of life. Carry on the good work.

**Lee Chai Yong
Kuantan**

I like to thank all the staff for being so generous in giving it free. The Lord has blessed me through this magazine. It is a wonderful thing to share the Gospel. May God bless your ministry. Please continue the good work. Once again, thank you.

**Ruth Fredrick Arokiam
Ipoh**

The Plain Truth is very enriching and helps us to understand the Bible better. The stories and examples tell us that God is extremely kind and merciful. I thank God for all the wonderful people who contribute to this magazine.

**Pius Ho
Kulim**

The Plain Truth articles are enlightening and challenging. Thank you for your commitment towards producing a Christ-centred publication! You will only know the results of your effort when Jesus returns. God bless you!

**Mark Kosinski
Melaka**

While vacationing at my friend's home in Skudai, Johore, Jesus showed me this magazine. I read it and I was inspired by the contents. I would appreciate if you could put my name on your mailing list. Thanks.

Raymond Wee

Last Sunday a fellow parishioner handed me 2 copies of The Plain Truth magazine (Apr-Jun and

Jul-Sep 2017) and I find them very informative. I would be very grateful if you could kindly send me this beautiful magazine to my address.

**James Lim
Mentakab**

The Plain Truth is informative, motivational and spiritual and I have gained a fair bit of guidance from it.

**Mak Geoh Yuen
Kuala Lumpur**

The Plain Truth articles are interesting and some are thought provoking. I have also recommended the magazine to some of my non-Christian friends.

**Ronald Soo
Klang**

The contents of The Plain Truth are very interesting and I am able to acquire more information and knowledge from the magazine.

**A Jayakumari
Sentul Pasar**

The articles help me in broadening my understanding of the Christian faith from many perspectives.

**Hoh Kon Wai
Cheras**

My family and I thank you and your co-workers for supplying us this wonderful magazine which inspires us in many ways. May the blessed hands of God be with you in all your daily undertakings.

**Subramaniam Paul
Seremban**

I read the Plain Truth lent to me by my neighbour and I really like its contents. Besides, I want to improve my understanding of Christianity.

**R. Sudiah
Kota Marudu**

The Plain Truth articles are so inspiring that they give me a much-needed boost when I am feeling down. May God Almighty bless all those who serve and contribute to the publication of this magazine!

**Geh Cheng Lok
Penang**

I have always enjoyed reading your refreshing articles which I often use for revision in my Bible class. You present a different perspective of this challenging world by offering age old solutions from the Bible. Thank you for a very good work done. Do continue with you effort and we pray the good Lord will guide and sustain you always.

**Peter Wang
Kuala Lumpur**

The Plain Truth articles are interesting and enlightening. They make me think. I share the magazine with my friends.

**Selvaraju Chidabaram
Klang**

The articles are thought-provoking, helpful, relevant and more importantly, biblical.

**Gan Tian Eng
Klang**

The articles are enlightening with lots of wisdom to help us cope with the challenges of our daily life.

**Patrick Foo
Petaling Jaya**

The Plain Truth gives us spiritual understanding and practical guidance. My late parents embraced Christianity at a very old age after their retirement from government service. They had peace of mind until they departed to be with the Lord.

**Quah Steven
Kuala Lumpur**

The Plain Truth not only enhances my knowledge of the Gospel but also matters pertaining to life which are relevant to us.

**Magdalene Ang
Kuala Lumpur**

The Plain Truth inspires me. It has taught me the way of Life and it is valuable to my spiritual life.

**Kung Kuan Hao
Tawau**

The Plain Truth articles open our minds to many things that we take for granted and the words of the Lord become more meaningful. After I have read it, the copy is circulated to many others.

**Dr. Daisy Arianayagam
Sungei Petani**

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Dying to live

What does it mean to participate in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

[Jesus] saying, *"The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."*

Then he said to them all, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it." (Luke 9:22-24, Matthew. 16:25, Mark 8:35)

What a delightful scripture. I remember how these words were first presented to me, and I guess many of you do too. The basic message was:

Self is bad; self is evil; self needs to die!

Do you remember that kind of religion? If anything was fun, it was sin. If you desired it, it was of the devil.

It is for good reason that people abandon that type of religion and seek deeper understanding. And that is what we'll do in this exploration – honestly seeking the meaning and beauty of what Jesus communicated here.

One of the alternative interpretations that has been developed around the above scripture, places the focus on our inclusion in the death and resurrection of Jesus by adding scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 5:14: *"... we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died"* and Romans 6:10-11: *"We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus."*

These scriptures show that the death and resurrection of Jesus included us in some form. Consequently the 'death of self' and 'death to sin' should no longer be dependent on individual effort, but rather an identification with his death: *"consider yourself dead..."*

So much could and should be said about this identification, about the beauty of our inclusion in these events, but I want to specifically look at how it relates to Luke 9:23-24 – the idea of taking up our cross daily and following Christ. Unfortunately, the idea of our inclusion in this death and resurrection is often used to simply explain away the very words of Jesus that refer to a daily ongoing experience. Instead of 'inclusion' illuminating the meaning of 'follow me; deny yourself, take up your cross daily' it simply makes these words non-applicable... irrelevant. The way this sounds is: "You've died with Christ, so there is no need to take up your cross daily anymore" or "The old self came to an end on the cross, so forget about losing your self etc and start discovering the new self that was raised."

by
Andre Rabe

Does that sound familiar. Such interpretations do not explain the meaning of Jesus' words in Luke 9, they explain them away.

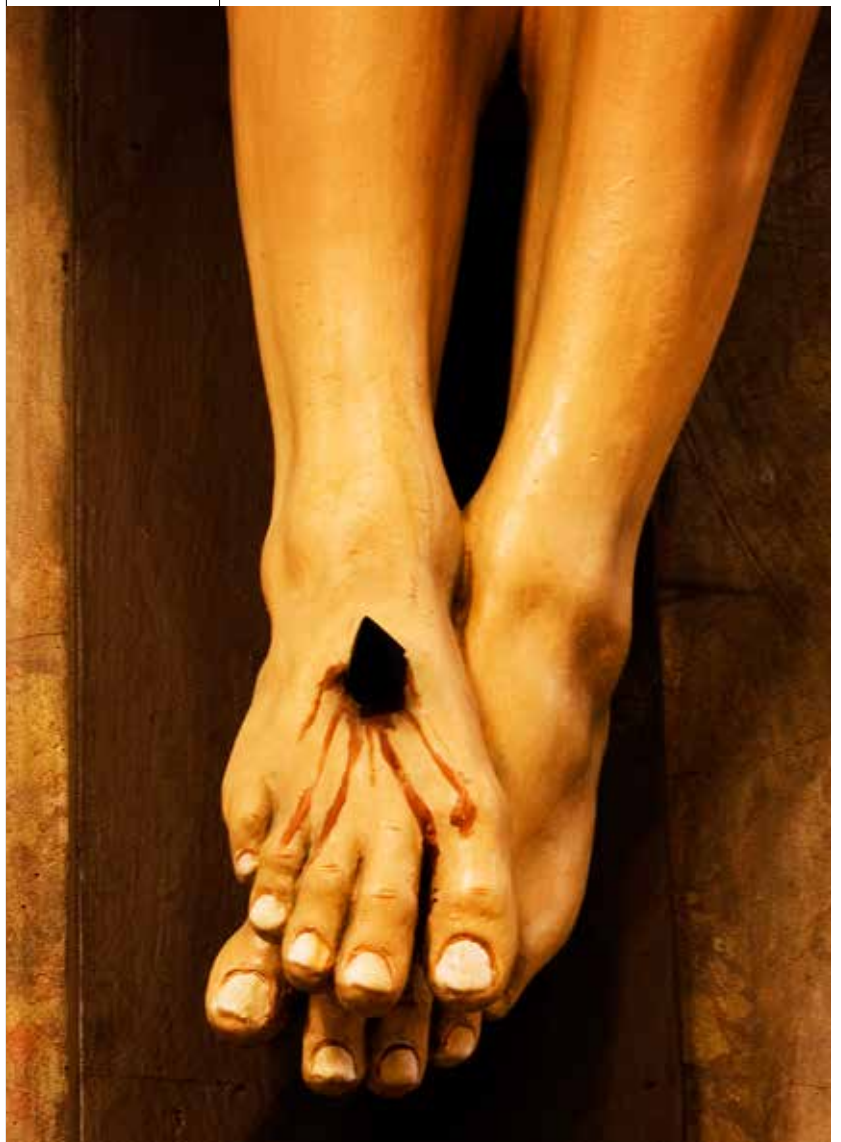
So how do we understand our inclusion? Before we get to the good stuff, I want to make you aware of some of the ideas around inclusion we have encountered in our conversation that I don't think are very useful or coherent.

Substitution

This substitutionary view takes this form:

Jesus died... so that I don't have to. I only do the living part.

Jesus experiences the pain and suffering of the cross... so that I don't have to. I only experience blissful resurrection, etc.



Can you see why the idea of following Jesus and taking up your cross daily is rather difficult to reconcile with such a substitutionary view?

You don't follow a substitute. You observe the substitute from a distance. Maybe you can identify with him mentally, but in practice you let him do the tough stuff, the dying stuff... and you'll do the fun stuff. Isn't that proof of how much he loves us – he protects us from all contradiction, all the hard stuff? This perspective is in reality just an avoidance strategy – a way of suppressing what we don't have the courage to deal with, hoping that if we deny reality and avoid it long enough it will disappear. Consequently, the idea of taking up the cross daily is simply discarded as no longer valid... as 'old covenant' or whatever other wording can be found to ignore this passage forever.

Personal pre-existence

Now I know this view might be a surprise to many, but we have encountered a number who hold to this view. These folks believe that they were included in the death and resurrection of Jesus because they were personally present and mystically united with Jesus 2000+ years ago. In other words, every person has some sort of pre-existence and that every person was individually present and part of these historic events.

There is nothing in scripture that directly supports such a view – it is dependent on highly imaginative interpretations. The line between mystery and fantasy can be very thin at times and this view seems to drift away from the mystery side. It's a niche view but I thought it's worth mentioning.

But let's move on.

Representation

The incarnation, the idea of God becoming flesh in the person of Jesus, is the context for the view of 'representation'. In this section I want to draw attention to the work of the ancient church father Irenaeus and how it has been illuminated by the work of Rene Girard. This perspective opens up an ancient treasure but also exciting new possibilities to understand the representation of Jesus Christ.

Irenaeus (ca. 125-202) was bishop in what is known today as Lyon, France. His central theological thought came to be known as the 'recapitulation', meaning that Jesus summed up human history and brought it to a conclusion in this drama of redemption. Christ's achievement is a transformation of the human story... not an abstract narrative, but one in which God becomes an active participant in the real history of humanity.

It is because Christ's life effects a narrative reversal, which unwinds the story of sin and death and re-inaugurates the story that God tells from before the foundation of the world – the story of the creation he wills, freely, in his eternal counsels – that Christ's life effects an ontological restoration of creation's goodness. (David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*, Kindle Locations 5113-5115, Kindle Edition)

Despite the fact that much of our anthropological, sociological and archaeological knowledge was not available to Irenaeus, his intuition has been remarkable enriched and affirmed by what we discovered of the

human story. Rene Girard illuminated the ancient human story, preserved in both myth and ritual throughout many cultures. He showed how ancient origin myths shared common traits and uncovered the events that gave birth to these stories. In a way these stories document the perversion of human desire and the cycles of chaos and order that formed our civilizations. It is the story, in Biblical terms, of the first Adam. Myths of dying and rising gods, of sacrificial violence that turns chaos into order, of angry gods pacified by the blood of our victims... these myths occur all over the world.

The Biblical stories are remarkably similar to these origin myths. In other words, the scriptures do not ignore the human narrative and simply tell a different story. No. The scriptures entangle themselves with these ancient narratives, but instead of hiding the events that gave birth to these stories, they begin to expose the truth behind them. Scripture is in the process of subverting the human story by entering into conversation with it.

Jesus, in the fullness of time, comes to summarize time, comes to reveal what was hidden since the foundation of the world. Irenaeus and other ancient church fathers recognized this aspect of Jesus work – Jesus recapitulates and summarizes all of human history. He enters our narratives not in a theoretical abstract way, but as an active actor within this drama – an entangled participant in this story. If you are human, this is your history as well.

Ultimately he enters into the heart of our narratives to subvert them; to reveal that our victims are innocent; to reveal that God does not condone our violence nor is God the angry one needing our sacrifices to be pacified. Rather, God is the one who suffers our violence. In Jesus God identifies with the victim and in the resurrection demonstrates how victims and victimizers can be transformed. Forgiveness breaks the cycle of victims becoming victimizers.

So much more can be said, but the focal point is this: There are many ways of understanding humanity's inclusion in Jesus Christ. One that has ancient roots and has been given new depth through the work of Rene Girard's Mimetic Theory is recognizing how Jesus' story recapitulates all of human history – a history we all share in – and then inverts it, opening up a whole new way of being human.

But remember our central quest here: how do these ideas of being included in the death and resurrection of Jesus relate to Jesus' invitation to follow him, to take up our cross daily? Well, this 'representative' view opens up real possibilities of following Jesus in living a counter-cultural adventurous story, one which subverts every narrative that still justifies violence.

Practical Application

Jesus enters into the heart of our narratives, not only in this universal and general way, but specifically and individually into your story. The broad history of humanity is concluded in the fullness of time, but Jesus also enters the depth of the human

experience with all its complexities, contradictions and confrontations. And so Jesus demonstrates the depth of God's entanglement with us. God is deeply intertwined in the human experience.

In contrast to the substitutionary view or the pre-existence fantasies, there is nothing in the 'representative' view that prevents us from following Jesus. The same Paul who wrote 'one died for all, therefore all have died' in 2 Corinthians 5:14, also gave us the practical application of that reality in the previous chapter, saying: *"always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh."* (2 Corinthians 4:10-11)

Do you notice that Paul did not say "always carrying within my mind a doctrine of the death of Jesus?" No. This death is an ongoing experience, an unfolding phenomenon.

This question might help in highlighting the point. Is your inclusion in the death and resurrection of Jesus a once-off event, or an ongoing process?

It certainly seems like both Jesus and Paul spoke of an ongoing daily experience... of both death and resurrection, of gaining when losing. If the new creation is something that came about once in the resurrection of Jesus, or for you personally when you made a decision for Christ, then it is not really new anymore, is it? It's getting old quickly. For it to remain new it has to be an ongoing process, an unfolding story.

Transformation

So what does this ongoing participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus look like?

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. (2 Corinthians 4:8-10)

Being afflicted, distressed and pressured from every side, can easily become a devastating and crushing experience. My union with Christ Jesus is not a magical way of avoiding such affliction, but rather, it is exactly in his identification with our affliction and my recognition that he is with me in it, that the experience can be transformed. And instead of the outcome being crushing, a new solidity can be formed.

"...perplexed, but not driven to despair"

Being perplexed, bewildered... confused. What?! Should absolute certainty not be our constant experience in all situations? Paul acknowledges this perplexity. Without Christ such confusion can easily lead to despair, but in consciousness of our union with Christ it too is transformed. It becomes the necessary bewilderment that leads us to greater astonishment at the beauty of truth. And so, instead of a boring, static set of beliefs, faith becomes the never ending journey of unfolding wonder.

Our participating in Christ's death and resurrection is

an infinitely unfolding experience in which:

Life is made visible in death (2 Corinthians 4:10)

Light is part of darkness. (2 Corinthians 4:6, Genesis 1:3)

Gaining comes through losing. (Luke 9:23-24)

Power is found in weakness. (2 Corinthians 12:9)

Foolishness is wiser than wisdom. (1 Corinthians 1:25)

Glory springs from dishonor. (1 Corinthians 15:43)

Contentment is found in hardship, insults and calamities. (2 Corinthians 12:10)

Renewal is a process of wasting away. (2 Corinthians 4:16)

And I do not simply mean that the positive sequentially follows the negative, but rather that these experiences are inseparably intertwined.

Losing Self

And so denying self and losing self becomes essentially part of recognizing and saving self. It is not that there is a bad self that needs to be replaced by a good self, but rather, the self you are conscious of is less than the possibility of being available to you. God is conscious of more and to partake of that consciousness you have to lose the boundaries of your own awareness; of your own definitions of self, of your own certainties.

The way of entering into a greater fulfilment or actualization of self, is by giving self away. It is by denying the boundaries and certainties of the current self that the impossibility of resurrection life can be realized. ☐

Total Surrender – Give It Away!

In Part 1 of this series on Total Surrender, we looked at the passive side of surrender: *Give It Up!* Now in Part 2, we'll conclude the series by looking at the active side of surrender: *Give It Away!* We'll do so by examining the words of Jesus and Paul, seeing (1) the steps toward total surrender, (2) the actions of the surrendered life and (3) the peace that results.

Opening Story

Perhaps you're heard theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's story. Raised in Germany in the early 1900s, he grew up in a large, well-to-do family. He loved to play sports and to play piano. In his early teens, he decided he was going to be a theologian. By the age of 20, he had written his doctoral thesis—a paper still widely read by even the most advanced students. Denominations will argue about the aptitude of great theologians such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Karl Barth and Thomas Aquinas, but when it comes to Dietrich, rarely will you hear one try to argue with his teaching. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was, without a doubt, a genius and the Christian church around the world is indebted to him—both for his brilliant writing and for his example of total surrender.

In his early 20s, Bonhoeffer became a renowned professor. By his late 30s, he had accepted a position to teach theology in America. But there was something ominous going on back in Germany and Dietrich was filled with guilt as he sat at ease lecturing in America while his country descended into turmoil under the tyrannical leadership of Adolph Hitler.

After a few months of angst, he set sail back for his country full of confidence that God was calling him to return home to Germany where, tragically, the German church had come into submission to the German government. This change happened gradually, but soon the teachings of Hitler about a pure German race were accepted as Christian teachings. Some Christians readily accepted these teachings, while others did so out of fear. But Dietrich and some others openly objected. At his arrival in Germany, he was unable to openly teach Christian doctrine, so he formed an underground seminary where he taught students.

The question Dietrich faced was two-fold: "What do I do to stop this." And "what is my call to action to participate with Christ?" Though he knew about, and had even taught about pacifism (accepting Jesus' call to turn the other cheek), he came to believe that in this circumstance, Hitler should be executed. With a band of a few other people who had not bought into the delusional teaching of Hitler, he helped plan Hitler's assassination. Those plans were carried out twice—once in a meeting and once on an airplane—both failed. Eventually Dietrich's part in the assassination plot

by
Dustin Lampe

was discovered, he was imprisoned and, at age of 39, the German Gestapo executed Bonhoeffer by hanging.

The steps toward total surrender

What does Bonhoeffer's story teach us about the surrendered life? To answer that question we need to look at what Jesus teaches in Matthew 16:21-28 concerning the steps toward total surrender.

In this passage, Jesus tells his followers that he is headed toward a time of terrible suffering. Peter objects, arguing that Jesus must not allow that to happen. But Jesus doesn't take too kindly to Peter's rebuke and warns him that is thinking the way Satan does (telling him to "Get behind me, Satan!"). By focusing on mere human things, Peter is ignoring the things of God—the sovereign reign of God.

At this point, Jesus turns to the disciples and addresses the topic of total surrender. He tells them three things: (1) to deny themselves, (2) to take up their cross, and (3) to lose their life. Jesus wasn't pulling any punches—he was making it clear what Christians are called to.



What is Jesus' strategy here? Is he wanting to portray the Christian life as so humanly impossible that we'll have to rely fully on God? Well, I see a couple of things that Jesus is doing here: First, he is offering a *general call* to all people to self-denial. Second, he is offering a *specific call* to each individual, saying they have a particular cross to bear, a particular life to lose. But how do we apply this personally?

First, we have to recognize that we have a particular *self* to deny. As each of us grew up, we formed a particular identity. That was true for Jesus as he formed an identity as he grew up—one that was particular to both his genetics and to the environmental context in which he was raised. Scripture says that as he grew up, he gained wisdom and also favor with both God and the people around him.

As each of us grew up a million factors shaped our emerging identity—our emerging self. Some of those factors were genetic (our DNA) and others were environmental. Some call this *container formation*.

What follows is an illustration from my own life—you will need to change the details to fit your life's experience.

My container was shaped around working hard on the farm, playing baseball, making friends, going to

a Methodist Church, being a white boy, the grief of my dad's death when I was young, the anxiety of growing up in a mixed family when my mom remarried, etc.

However, these factors are not "Dustin." Whether my little ego can handle it or not, "Dustin" is who Jesus Christ says I am. And to surrender to Christ and so deny myself, gives me the freedom to say with Paul, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). In surrendering to God all that I labeled as "my life," I find my life. By taking all that Christ says is "my life" seriously, I find my life.

The point here is that your life—the factors that define your identity—brings with it a particular cross to bear, a particular set of things to surrender to Christ. Your cross may be your own set of very hard circumstances. But those circumstances do not define your true identity. In Christ, you are not defined as depressed, happy, rich, poor, red, blue, but as something so much more... or, we might say as *so much less*.

Your container formation said you were these things, but in surrendering to Christ you embrace his claim as to who you are—God's beloved child—regardless of the circumstances or what people might be saying.

The actions of the surrendered life

Let's now look at what Paul says in Romans 12:9-21 about actively living out Jesus' call to total surrender. We might call this "surrender in action."

Following up on his call to us to be transformed (Romans 12:1-8), Paul exhorts us in Romans 12:9-21 to let that transformation happen by taking active steps in the direction of total surrender. He tells us to (1) hate evil and love good, (2) live in harmony, and (3) bless our enemies instead of seeking vengeance. His instructions clearly assume we will, at times, suffer in following Christ. However, it shows us that God provides a way to live through the suffering, thus overcoming evil with good.

The surrender Paul illustrates involves good works—action. Though Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-10 that it is by grace that we are saved, we are called as those saved to participate in the good works of Christ. When grace—God's unconditional love for and favor toward all people—is deeply experienced and so valued, hard work and devotion to God becomes sheer joy. Grace and hard work thus go together. Good works are built on the solid rock of God's grace! Though we are not saved by the works, the life that Christ gives us includes good works. Works apart from grace, or some effort to "earn" or "deserve" grace is legalism.

So here we learn from Paul that suffering is part of a life of total surrender and that our identity is grounded in the grace of God, not in our works, though in following Christ, we will be active participants in his work, which flows from grace.

The peace that results

From Jesus words in John 16:33, we learn about the peace that results from total surrender to God. Speaking of his oneness with the Father and the troubles that are about to erupt, Jesus tells his disciples that though they face troubles in the world, in him they "may have peace." This is the case because Jesus has "overcome the world."

In making this pronouncement, Jesus is helping his

disciples learn that, in the midst of life's troubles (that often lead to anxiety-driven, frenzied activity), they can have peace—the peace that comes by trusting in the one who has overcome the world and its troubles through his own suffering and death.

Theologian Ray Anderson once shared a relevant illustration. He told of two people standing on a mountain top, looking out on a radiant scene below. One says, "I'm glad we made it here, now let's get back to work." Another, filled with wonder and worship, says "Let's linger here a while, soaking in the grandeur of God's creation."

Sadly, here in the West, there is an anxiety-driven, even tyrannical sense of urgency—get more, do more, see more. But then there is Christ's call to surrender—to surrendering the false values that are the basis for this anxiety in order to find our rest, our peace, in him.

Sadly, much of my early experience as a Christian was more about anxiety than rest. I was driven to be better, do more for God, hurry up and get more knowledge. I see that same perspective among many today. Their perspective on Christianity creates more anxiety than peace of mind.

We all need "space" in our lives to enjoy the view—to worship God, and so have peace of mind, despite what's going on around us. That "space" includes time for prayer—time to sit in God's presence and to enjoy the view. I recently asked a person in our church to volunteer and I can't tell you how pleased I was when he replied, "No, I need to take more time and just sit with God."

Conclusion

Don't misunderstand my point. Total surrender to God is not passive—it involves focused action, as noted by Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

The Christian cannot simply take for granted the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of His enemies. In the end, all His disciples abandoned Him. On the cross He was all alone, surrounded by criminals and the jeering crowds. He had come for the express purpose of bringing peace to the enemies of God. So Christians, too, belong not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the midst of enemies. There they find their mission, their work.

From the words of Jesus and Paul, and also Bonhoeffer, we learn that surrender to God is dynamic and active. But because it is grounded in the grace of God and involves trusting in and therefore resting in Christ, it brings about not anxiety and frenzy, but joy and peace. Actively surrendering to God yields a taste of heaven while living here on earth!

Make no mistake about it, as we surrender to God, we will encounter trouble. How well Bonhoeffer knew that! But no matter how dark it gets in the midst of that trouble, we know something more important—we know that we belong to God. Our identity as a child of God, which is our true identity, is not based on what's going on around us. It's also not based on what we do (or don't do). Instead, it's based on who God says we are, and what Jesus has done through his total surrender to God to secure that identity for us. In that, let us have peace. In that, let us rest. And based on that, let us join Jesus in the work he is now doing. Amen. □

Good News That Lasts



Have you ever gotten one of those “too good to be true” offers in the mail from a credit card company? They arrive in brightly-colored envelopes proclaiming things like, “Zero percent interest on new purchases for your first 12 months!” And of course, zero percent interest is pretty great. But then you read the fine print, and what seemed like good news at first turns out to only last for that introductory period of twelve months. After that? The real interest rate kicks in, and 12.5% isn’t very good news at all!

I was just tossing one of these flyers into the trash the other day when it hit me how much offers like that are the exact opposite of the Gospel. Because the good news of the Gospel never expires! There is no “introductory rate” on grace – it’s just that good, forever! Listen to how the apostle Paul puts it: “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1).

I love this verse, because it sums up the permanence of the Gospel so well. It’s not temporary good news, it’s permanent. And here, Paul reminds the Galatians of that truth, and then encourages them to “stand firm” in it, in order to resist being “burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”

I think he’s speaking here to the human tendency to view God as a cosmic cop who’s watching our every move. Sure, he forgave us that one time, for that one sin, but what happens when I sin again? Won’t he count that against me? Won’t the “offer” of grace expire at



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Tkach**

some point? Won’t he give up on me and say I’m a lost cause?

Do you see how damaging that mindset can be? We shift from the promise of permanent good news, to one of temporary good news -- and the problem is, that’s just not the Gospel of Jesus. In Christ, we’re fully forgiven, forever, and that will never, ever change. God will not give up on those he loves. He gives us a new start so we can continue to grow up in him, so we can become conformed to Christ, healed and restored. His love will bring to completion the good work he began in us and among us. His love loves to wholeness and completeness. When we waver in that hope, we slip back into the “temporary good news” mindset, which Paul so rightfully calls a “yoke of slavery.”

So the next time you feel yourself being tempted to believe that the grace of our triune God is some kind of “introductory offer” that expires, do what I did with that flyer, and throw that thought where it belongs: in the trash! ☐

Is anything certain?

Pliny the Elder, a first-century writer and philosopher, lived in the Roman Empire during a time of civil war, disputes between different cultures and life styles, and worship of false gods. He noted, "In these matters the only certainty is that nothing is certain."

You and I also live in uncertain times--threats of war, terrorism, floods, demonstrations and outbreaks of violence, warnings of economic collapse, earthquakes, and tsunamis. You've probably heard the saying, "There's nothing certain except death and taxes."

However, when we learn to trust Jesus, some aspects of life become unshakably reliable. We can be absolutely certain that we are secure in his care no matter what may occur.

Jesus will never leave us

In the midst of difficulties and uncertainties we may find it hard to believe he is always with us.

If you are like me, our confidence may waver. "Is he really with me in this difficulty?" During difficult times King David also openly expressed deep despair in some of his psalms. But when he directed his thoughts towards God, he found comfort as expressed in Psalm 23:4, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me."

God's promises can bring you and me comfort.

Immediately before his ascension to heaven Jesus told his disciples, "...surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."¹ Just as surely, he is with all Christians today and until he returns. The writer of Hebrews quotes God as promising, "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you."²

We can be assured of his presence and his ability to bring us out of troubling times, and to not allow us to be tempted or tried above our ability.³

Jesus will always love us

God's love is greater than human love. His love never wavers. It endures, and has no conditions. It will never fail.⁴ He loves everyone whether they are saved or not yet saved. The Apostle Paul tells us, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."⁵ In dying for all humanity he demonstrated the ultimate act of love. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."⁶ Paul continued, stressing Jesus'



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unshakeable love, "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons; neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."⁷

Psalm 136:1 tells us to be thankful for the Lord's love. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. *His love endures forever.*"

Thank you Lord, for your unfailing love!

Jesus will finish what he started

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, called us into his flock, ultimately to be given everlasting life. In speaking of his sheep, Jesus said, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."⁸ Even if we, like sheep often do, drift away from the flock, he will bring us back.

As Paul said, you and I can be "confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."⁹ The "good work" refers to the fulfillment of his plan to bring us into his coming kingdom.

You and I tend to feel discouraged when we face negative circumstances. But when we focus our thoughts on things above, we will get a different

perspective. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."¹⁰

As individuals we may encounter unexpected illness, financial loss, the death of a loved one, employment difficulties or accidents. Indeed, it seems that *nothing* is certain in our world.

No matter what happens to you or me, we can always take comfort and assurance in the Lord's unshakably certain promise to us, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom."¹¹ □

Thank you, our God and our Lord for your unwavering promises to always be with us, to always love us, and to bring us out of every difficulty and into your kingdom.



¹ Matthew 28:20

² Hebrews 13:5

³ 1 Corinthians 10:13

⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:8

⁵ Romans 5:8

⁶ John 15:13

⁷ Romans 8:38, 39

⁸ John 10:28, 29:

⁹ Philippians 1:6

¹⁰ Hebrews 12:2, 3

¹¹ Luke 12:32

The two side

Scripture tells us that we are *saved by grace* through faith [in Christ]. You can read that in Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast."

The phrase *saved by grace* is often misunderstood and misused. Some take it to mean that, because God offers salvation freely, we are not bound by his laws (mainly, the 10 commandments). Others take it to mean that, although God offers salvation freely, we are nevertheless bound by his laws.

So what does *saved by grace* means? Is God's grace opposed to His law? Or, is His law another side or aspect of His grace?

This article explains the two sides of God's grace: *the indicatives of grace and the imperatives of grace*.

Indicatives of grace

This aspect of grace tells us that God in his sovereign freedom and grace made us in his image and likeness and included us in His life so we could participate in His life as His children. That was God's desire for us, but in our sin, we lost knowledge of that reality. But that didn't deter God from pursuing His desire for us.

At the fullness of time, God sent His son Jesus Christ to rescue us from sin and death and reconcile us to God. Jesus came to remove our spiritual blindness and reveal God's purpose for us. He came to reveal the true God and our true self. By His life, death, resurrection and ascension, He paved the way so we could enter into a *personal* relationship with Him and *participate* in His abundant life. And to make that possible He sent His Holy Spirit to indwell and empower us to live and preach the gospel. The gospel is the *good news* that in Christ Jesus, God has forgiven all our sins (past, present, future) and is now inviting us to come and participate in His life. That is what the Holy Spirit is doing today. The Spirit is moving through the nations, convincing, convicting and awakening people to this wonderful truth so that they too might believe and participate in this new life.

All this is the *gracious* act of God. We played no part to earn or deserve it. What God did for us through His son Jesus and by His Spirit is universal in scope. It includes all people. That is how God *reconciled the world to Himself*. It includes both believers and unbelievers (or pre-believers as some call them). This is what indicatives of grace means. It *precedes* the imperatives of grace.

Imperatives of grace

This aspect of grace follows the indicatives of grace. The indicatives of grace declare that God has forgiven all our sins and therefore does not hold our sins against us, meaning, we are not under condemnation. Grace not only forgives our sin, but also places us in a *relationship* with Him that calls for *interaction and participation*.



by
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What God did for us in Christ Jesus is *huge*. Not only did He cancel our sin and death, He also freely gave us His son's righteousness as a gift. More than that, He also *adopted* us into His family as His sons and daughters, and seated us with Him in the heavenly realm.

So how should we respond to His amazing gift of grace? Shouldn't we respond with thanksgiving, gratitude, service, worship and *obligations*?

This is where the imperatives of grace come in. While God's grace is free and unmerited, it has *obligations* – it leads us to repentance, faith, baptism, obedience, good works, service and worship. God desires that we *participate* in the new life He has given us, just like any good parent desires the best for their children.



Receptivity and obligations are unconditional, not contractual or forced by God.

God's grace is active; it moves and energizes us to participate in His life by His Spirit, and live our new lives in Christ.

Some examples

The Bible gives many examples of these two aspects of grace – the indicatives of grace and the imperatives of grace. Here are a few.

After God delivered Israel from Pharaoh's oppression, He [through Prophet Moses] spoke to them saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery [indicatives of grace],¹ he gave them the 10 commandments, "You shall have no other

s of grace

gods before me... [imperatives of grace].” The last 5 commandments, far from being oppressive, actually tell us how to love and relate to our neighbours.

When the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, Jesus assured her: “Neither do I condemn you [indicatives of grace]; go and sin no more [imperatives of grace].”²

Apostle Paul also mentions these two aspects of grace in some of his epistles/letters:

He asked the question: “If God has forgiven our sin [indicatives of grace], should we continue sinning?” Then he answers: “By no means! How can we live in sin any longer [imperatives of grace]?”³

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ [indicatives of grace], set your hearts on things above,



where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things...Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry [imperatives of grace].”⁴

“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people [indicatives of grace]. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age [imperatives of grace].”⁵

“...God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ [indicatives of grace]. So then, brothers and sisters,

*stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter [imperatives of grace].”*⁶

Grace invites us to a relationship

Sin alienates (separates) us from God. We fear approaching God because of shame, guilt, or fear of punishment. So God took the initiative to forgive our sin and enter into a *personal* relationship with us [indicatives of grace]. Now He calls/invites us to enter into a *personal* relationship with Him and participate in His life [imperatives of grace].⁷

Relationship means sharing and *participating* in each other's life (as in marriage). For example, Jesus called His disciples and gave them power and authority to go and preach the good news, heal the sick, and cast out demons [indicatives of grace]. And they went out and *participated* in His ministry [imperatives of grace].

Some parables in the Bible actually allude to these two aspects of grace. For example, in the parables of the minas,⁸ the talents, and the sheep and goats,⁹ the master/king freely gave his servants certain gifts (minas, talents and opportunities) [indicatives of grace] and asked them to go and use these gifts [imperatives of grace]. It is the same today. God has given us his gift of salvation and invites us to come and participate in his life by his Spirit.

Similarly, just before he ascended to heaven, Jesus told His disciples, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you [imperatives of grace]. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age [indicatives of grace].”¹⁰

Summary

Is God's grace opposed to His law [of love]? No, God's grace and His law go together – they are complementary. The laws against killing, stealing, coveting...are simply expressions of God's grace. They aim to set people free from oppression, and from the consequences of unloving choices. *The law cannot and does not save us; grace does.* God's grace leads us to righteous living - it transforms us.

By grace, God reconciled us to Himself through His son Jesus and entered into a personal dynamic relationship with us. By grace, He gives us His Spirit and invites us to enter into a personal relationship with Him. *This is a love relationship* where God gives Himself fully and freely to us and we fully and freely give ourselves to Him. This relationship invites us to participate in His life even as He participates in our life. It is about intimate love relationship, a life of union and communion, where each gives 100% to the other.☐

¹ Exodus 20:1-17

² John 8:10-11

³ Romans 6:1-3

⁴ Colossians 3:1-5

⁵ Titus 2:11

⁶ 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

⁷ Luke 10:1-23

⁸ Luke 19

⁹ Matthew 25

¹⁰ Matthew 28:18-20

Jesus Sees A Harvest Field—Do We?

Introduction

Though Jesus tried to contain his popularity, his reputation spread like wildfire throughout Galilee and on into Judea. Wherever he went, crowds followed, many hoping to receive healing and help from this miracle-working rabbi. In chapter 9, Matthew cites case after case of Jesus acting on requests for help from people around him. Amazed crowds (Matthew 9:8, 33) gathered wherever he went. Desperate people flocked to him.

This is the backdrop of this lesson. We find Jesus recognizing a great, ripe, spiritual harvest field and sending his apostles out into it to reap. But what does this passage have to do with us today? In this article we'll see that Jesus gives us the same invitation and challenge. May we have ears to hear?

Jesus cares and acts

Truly caring about the state of humanity, Jesus acts. Matthew writes, "Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:35-36)

In this country beaten down by the Roman occupiers, Jesus' message about the kingdom of God was relevant and attention-grabbing. But just as compelling was the compassion he showed in response to the people's need, offering help and healing. Jesus viewed these "harassed and helpless" people as "sheep without a shepherd." Other leaders might have seen this situation as an opportunity to grab a following, but not Jesus. Showing his compassionate heart for suffering humanity, he reached out to address their needs, both physical and spiritual.

Jesus assesses and prays

Then in Matthew 9:37, Jesus uses a metaphor to describe to his followers his assessment of the situation: "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few." It was as if Jesus was standing before a field, perhaps a large wheat field, ready for harvest, and having the frustrating feeling that although he desires that the harvest be brought in, the task of doing so is too great for one person.

Have you ever felt that way? Suppose your house desperately needs attention: repairs, cleaning, painting—months of work for one person, but you need it done soon. You'll have to hire carpenters,

by
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electricians, plumbers, a cleaning service crew and a team of painters.

Seeing the enormity of the fields ripe for harvest, rather than heading out to hire a crew, Jesus turned to prayer, saying this to his disciples: "Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:38). This is how Jesus thought—this is the prayerful, dependent posture by which he lived. Jesus' first priority always was to pray, and here he shares that priority with his disciples. Whereas the natural tendency is to see prayer as the last resort, Jesus wanted his followers to understand that prayer must precede any efforts of our own in the harvest field. Why? Because the field belongs to the Lord, who not only creates the fruit, but is able to supply the labourers needed to reap the harvest.

Jesus assembles and commissions

Jesus' next step was to assemble a team of harvesters using resources God had made available. These resources were available because Jesus had followed God's earlier instructions to call and equip a team for ministry. The time to send that team into the mission field had arrived:

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness (Matthew 10:1).

Jesus gave his followers authority. This was the extension to them of the authority Jesus possessed as Messiah. Note Isaiah's prophecy:

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners. (Isaiah 61:1)

This authority was not automatically conferred on the disciples when they began following Jesus. But now the time had come for them to be sent out bearing some of Jesus' authority. Note that Matthew calls them apostles (Matthew 10:2), meaning "ones sent" (Matthew 10:5). Jesus was giving them a temporary commission to go to work in the harvest field.

As we know, no job of any significance can be done without instruction and training. Parents know that even the simplest tasks, such as making up a bed or cleaning a room, will be incomplete if attempted by untrained children. Children need to be trained; merely issuing



orders will not get the job done. Wise parents often start by doing the task first while the child watches. Next, the parent participates with the child as the child tries to do the task, then they step back and watch the child do the task, giving both encouraging and gently corrective feedback. The child then understands the parent can delegate the task to them.

Jesus had been training his disciples for months before this commissioning. They had watched him work and had begun to participate with him. Now it was time for further training that involved a specific assignment, and so Jesus sent them out with these instructions:

Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give." (Matthew 10:5-8)

Note that their primary task was to proclaim the gospel in a particular way that included words concerning the kingdom of heaven. These words were apparently specific to this mission—they are not included in the many examples of proclaiming the gospel elsewhere in the New Testament. The miraculous works of healing and exorcism were also part of this mission. Later examples of proclaiming the gospel—especially in the book of Acts—do not always include miracles.

The lesson for us

Though this particular assignment (commission) was temporary, its lesson is timeless, and certainly applicable to us today. The Son of God, sent by the Father and anointed with the Holy Spirit, saw humanity as lost sheep needing a shepherd. Jesus was moved by his compassion to send others, prepared by him to participate in the harvest. It's important for us to realize that Jesus is alive—our ascended Lord has the same perspective on humanity and on the mission of the church today. With the same compassion, he sees humanity's needs today. And all along, Jesus has been calling and equipping a team—it's called the church—a team he sends into the harvest field with specific instructions. They are to go bearing Jesus' perspective, including his heart of compassion.

Here's what we can do to be faithful to who Jesus is and to the commission he has given to us as his fellow harvest workers:

Start with prayer. Jesus set a wonderful example for us in this. At all times, but particularly when the task seems overwhelming, we should pray. The challenges we face personally and as a congregation are bigger than any one of us and even all of us together apart from the Lord. We need his help!

Remember that Jesus said that the harvest has a Lord. Do we look at our tasks that way? Do we see what appears to be mountains before us and realize that there is a Lord of those mountains? When Jesus explained that the Lord of the harvest would send laborers, he implied that they would be given a heart like his—a heart of compassion for lost people. We do not need to try to work up that heart, but we can and should pray for it.

Get equipped. Jesus started with prayer, but he did not stop there. Our next step is to act according to

our current abilities and training. As individuals and congregations this is a challenge. Jesus invested much time to train his disciples. In the same way, church leaders must train today's followers of Jesus. Each of us has a role according to the gifts we have been given. Whatever the gift and role, whether participating in community service, giving personal assistance, telling people about Jesus, or being part of an outreach team, we must be receptive to the training opportunities available.

Get going. Finally, having been equipped and instructed, we go into the harvest field (where prayer and equipping continues). As in farming crops, each harvest field is unique, but some things apply to all.

A small congregation I know has been getting out into the "harvest field" that is their neighborhood. They received training and instructions from their pastoral team, but all they really needed to do was engage with the neighbors around their place of meeting. Through an open house, an outreach event to support families of school children returning after summer break, a fall festival, and other activities, the members started to get involved with the neighbors and that involvement continued to grow. Where needs arose, they helped. As a result, the congregation became known in the community as people who care and want to help in any way they can. As a result, a number of neighbors investigated the congregation more deeply and some began attending and some became members. The church members called their endeavors to be involved in the community "outreach." The New Testament calls it "good works." Jesus calls it going out into the harvest field to both sow and reap.

How a congregation obeys Jesus' call to enter into his work in the harvest field will depend on the particular needs of the neighborhood and circumstances of the both the neighbors and the church members. In all cases, expressing the love of the Triune God for humanity as Jesus did is the key. Even where the gospel is not immediately embraced, a positive example of God's love can move people to respond later. Even if people in the neighborhood do not attend our church but choose to attend elsewhere, we need not be disappointed. The important thing is that people respond to the good news of Jesus Christ and begin to entrust their lives to him. Any way or time that a person accepts Jesus Christ and enters a life of trusting the Father through Christ and by the Spirit, we can and should rejoice! We are participating with Jesus in what he is doing to express his heart of compassion for harassed and helpless lost sheep.

Conclusion

As Jesus looks at the world, he sees fields ripe for harvest. He wants his followers to see the fields around them, and participate with him in reaping the harvest near at hand. Are we moved with his compassion to pray for workers? Are we willing to be trained, instructed and sent? □

Mega-Faith

Introduction

This article looks at a powerful example of faith from an unexpected source. The backdrop is what we read in Matthew 15, along with the history of Israel's conquest of the inhabitants of those living in the Promised Land. Matthew wrote of Jesus' confrontation of the Jew's spiritual concept of clean versus unclean—both things and people.

The Jews had misinterpreted the ceremonial laws written by Moses, thinking that people were made spiritually unclean by the introduction of contaminants in their food. Their idea of clean was not like our modern understanding of good hygiene. They thought that there was some spiritual effect to exposure to uncleanness. Jesus debunks that notion, explaining that spiritual uncleanness is rooted in sinful human thoughts.

Considering Gentiles to be unclean, Jews refused to enter the home of a Gentile and would not eat with them. Of all the Gentile peoples, to the Jewish mind there were none worse than the Canaanites, the former inhabitants of the Land promised to the descendants of Israel. Canaan was Noah's notorious grandson. His descendants were the people that the Israelites were to displace at the end of their exodus and migration from Egypt. Moses explained that it was because of their sinful and degenerate practices that God had determined that they had to be expelled from the Land lest they influence the Israelites into adopting their corrupt and idolatrous ways. During his travels, Jesus encountered a descendant of the Canaanites and in the process set the record straight about the notion of unclean people and the role faith plays in the grace of God.

The Canaanite woman's request

Jesus spent most of the years of his ministry within the borders of Israel. He served the people who lived in the provinces of Galilee and Judea and on occasion those who lived in Samaria, which was between Galilee and Judea. Only rarely did he travel outside these three provinces. Matthew 15 gives us an account of one such occasion.

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

Perhaps this was a short getaway to rest and refresh away from the antagonistic religious leaders from Jerusalem as well as the massive crowds that showed

by
Martin Manuel

up everywhere Jesus went. But even in the regions of Tyre and Sidon he could not avoid being recognized.

A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

This Canaanite woman's request was unusual. She did not call Jesus "Rabbi" or "Teacher" as others (including Jesus' disciples) often did. Instead, she called him "Lord, Son of David." The leaders of the Jewish religion would never have called Jesus that. The term "Son of David" was one of the highest titles that could be conferred upon a man—it literally implied Messiah.

Why would this Gentile, this woman, this Canaanite, call Jesus "Lord" followed by such a title? Her choice of words give away the answer: she was a long-distance

believer. Somehow she had come to learn about Jesus and consider him the long-awaited Messiah of Jewish faith. Although she was not a Jew, she was like many Gentiles who, living near Jews, were influenced by their religious beliefs. Such people were referred to as God-fearers. And here was Jesus in her city! Here was her opportunity to be delivered from the demonic torture she was experiencing through her troubled daughter. She did what a believer would do: ask for divine help. But she did not casually ask. Instead, she "cried out" to Jesus, pleading for mercy.

Jesus did not answer a word.

Jesus had encountered people before who, through demonic influence, recognized him, calling

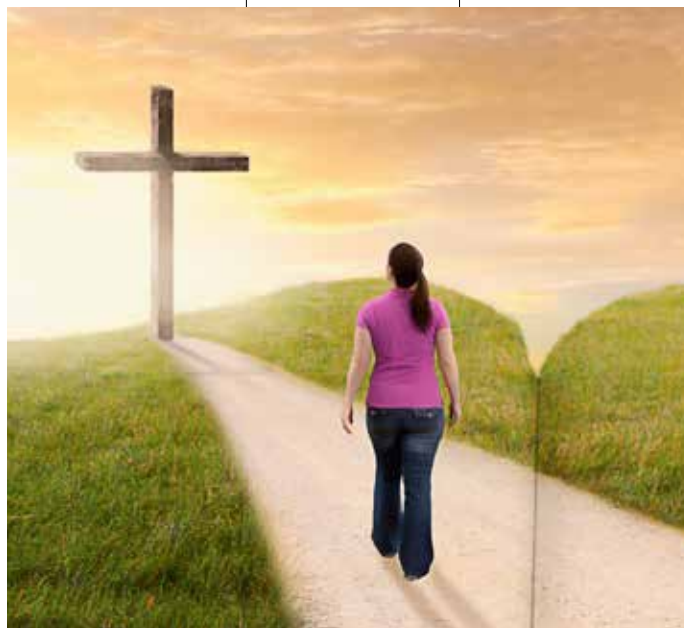
him Son of God and the like. He was not impressed by a flattering greeting. We do not know what he was thinking when he did not respond. But it did not matter: the woman would not let go. She followed Jesus and his disciples, repeating her request, pestering them with her calls.

So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."

Perhaps they wanted Jesus to react as they felt. After all, they knew she was a foreigner, and their Jewish revulsion of Gentiles might have been showing. Or maybe they just wanted Jesus to satisfy her request so that they could be rid of her.

He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

This answer reveals a specific detail of Jesus' mission



that might not have been obvious. Matthew had written that among those who welcomed Jesus' birth as son of David,¹ Messiah,² and king of the Jews³ included the Magi, who were Gentiles, but nonetheless had travelled far to worship him.⁴ They seemed to realize that his coming had implications far beyond the Jewish people, and they were correct. Although Jesus was well aware of the covenant with Abraham that through him all nations would be blessed, and knew that he, Jesus, came to fulfill it, he had a target audience for that phase of his earthly ministry, a target that excluded ministry outside of the people of Israel. His target was not based on preference or discrimination. It was purposeful in concert with God's plan, and it was practical in consideration of his limitations as a single human being.

It was important that his disciples understand this target audience, and he had clearly told them that they had the same target audience in their earlier temporary evangelistic ministry.⁵ Later Jesus told his disciples to make disciples of all nations⁶ as God's plan intended, but for that moment he focused on his immediate target. Apparently, the woman heard Jesus as he mentioned this target audience to his disciples.

The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said."

Showing unusual understanding, persistence, and faith, the woman did two extraordinary things: she knelt in worship and asked for help. Kneeling demonstrated her humble and worshipful spiritual posture. In her mind, the Messiah—sent by the God of Israel—was sent for her too. Her simple request for help echoed the humble trust of the Psalmist, who wrote, "My help comes from the Lord."⁷ This faith that she expressed was simple. She believed that the one to whom she was speaking had the power and grace to answer, so she put her whole heart into her petition.

Dogs?

[Jesus] replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

Why would Jesus respond in such a seemingly derogatory way? Did he literally think of her as a dog? Was he deliberately trying to offend her? The text does not convey such details as facial expression or tone of voice that could give meaning to the words. But a careful examination of the Greek version of Matthew's words softens what seems a harsh statement. The Greek word translated dogs is accurately translated little dogs. The word we might use today is puppies. In a figurative word picture the woman would have understood, Jesus portrayed children with their puppies in a household setting. Snatching a child's food from its mouth and giving it to a puppy would be inappropriate. The God-fearing woman realized that the Israelites were the covenant people—the children—and that the puppies, though in the household, were not. She accepted that fact.

To some people, Jesus' statement might have been offensive. It certainly tested the woman's sincerity. Although she understood the word picture, she could have seen such a portrayal from a Jew visiting her homeland as disparaging. If she was inclined, she could have reacted angrily. Anything other than a humble response would have exposed her as a hypocrite for

calling Jesus by such a high title, and asking of him such a serious favor.

One who truly trusts Jesus as the Anointed One of God sent for the deliverance of humanity will put him above everything else that otherwise would be important: personal pride, race, nationality, culture, religion, ideology, gender—everything! Jesus gave her permission to show what she truly thought about him and she did. She showed that she really believed that he was all she had uttered.

"Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

This statement, far from being just a quick-witted response, exposed her inner thoughts and motivations. Humble, yet insistent upon calling him Lord, she turned Jesus' word picture into a true presentation of her faith and fervent desire for his favorable response. As she saw it, the children of Israel were being fed by their Master, and some of the goodies that fell from their plates were appropriate game for a hungry puppy standing by.

The grace of God

Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Jesus' hesitancy, along with everything he had said so far, seemed unfavorable to this woman. Suddenly, his surprising words revealed his true heart toward her. In the Greek text, the word used for Jesus' characterization of the woman's faith was *meegas*. The English word *mega* is derived from this Greek word. Elsewhere in the New Testament, it is also translated loud, high, large, strong, and mighty. Jesus acknowledged her faith that shouted as if amplified by a megaphone! What a compliment! But even more awesome were his words that followed: "Your request is granted." Her request was for deliverance and healing, a divine act that could not possibly have been earned. Jesus said it was granted. That's another way of saying it was a gift—the essence of grace. The result was the instant deliverance and healing of her daughter. Glory to God!

Application

What does this mean to us? This powerful example was written not to applaud one person's exceptional faith, but to show Jesus' followers what *mega-faith* looks like. Please do not look at it as a standard to measure up to. Instead, consider it an invitation to express similar faith, and a pattern of trusting in and believing in Jesus for us to emulate. Let's consider that pattern.

Mega-faith starts with knowing who Jesus really is. Knowing that he is not just another prominent religious leader or great teacher, but the Son of God and High Priest, shapes our reaction to him, encouraging us to boldly approach him, acknowledging who he is, and humbly presenting our requests. Because of who he is, we can trust that he will faithfully respond (Jesus always does who Jesus is). Even if there seems to be an abnormally long silence before his response; even if there seems to be an indifference to our need or insensitivity to our suffering, we know better than to give in to discouragement because we know Jesus!

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The Transfiguration: Sneak Peek at the Resurrection¹

A study of Mark 9:1-13

The disciples are discouraged — even dismayed. They thought they were following a Messiah into a glorious kingdom. But then Jesus told them that He was going to His death.

Where was the glory they hoped for, the kingdom that Jesus seemed to promise? Jesus needed to offer his disciples some hope for the future, and this is what comes next in the story.

The kingdom in power and glory (verses 1-4)

Jesus told his disciples, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.” Jesus assures them that the glory of the kingdom will indeed come — and it will be seen before the disciples die.

The disciples had already seen some of the power of God’s kingdom. Whenever Jesus cast out demons and healed the sick, the power of the kingdom was at work.² The disciples saw the power of the kingdom on the day of Pentecost.³ They saw it in miracles, and in the spread of the gospel all the way to Rome.

But Jesus is referring to something else. His promise is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in each account, it is immediately followed by the Transfiguration, in which three disciples had the privilege of seeing Jesus in a special glory. In all three Gospels, we are told that the Transfiguration happened about a week after the prediction—the saying and the fulfillment are tied together by this literary technique.

“After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with Him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone.” Tradition says that this was Mount Tabor, but it is only 2,000 feet high. Mt. Hermon may be a better candidate, since it is the tallest mountain in the area (9,000 feet), and Caesarea Philippi is at the base of Mt. Hermon.

Peter, James and John were the disciples closest to Jesus. They also seem to have been the most ambitious — Peter was the most outspoken, and James and John wanted positions of honour when Jesus came in His glory.⁴ These three may have needed the most reassurance that something better would come after the persecution. And they saw it: “There He was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach

by
**Grace
Communion
International**

them. And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.”

Were Elijah and Moses resurrected, or was this just an ‘appearance?’ Matthew 17:2 says that Jesus’ face “shone like the sun.” Was it a vision, or was Jesus really changed? We don’t know. Why Moses and Elijah? That is more easily answered. Jews respected both of them highly, and they represent high points in Israelite history, corresponding to the Law and the Prophets.

What were they talking about? Luke 9:31 says that they were discussing Jesus’ “departure which He was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.” They were talking about His death. Did Elijah and Moses know the manner and purpose of Jesus’ death, or were they asking Jesus to explain it to them? Apparently it is not important that we know.

Listen to Jesus (verses 5-8)

If we had been there, we probably would not have understood it any better than Peter did. “Peter said to Jesus, ‘Rabbi, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters — one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ (He did not know what to say, they were so frightened.)”

A week earlier, Peter said that Jesus was the Messiah. Now, he uses the lesser title ‘Rabbi.’ Which title is most appropriate? We will soon have an authoritative answer!

Why did Peter talk about shelters? In a state of glory, why would anyone need a shelter? Perhaps Peter was thinking of the Festival of Tabernacles, which many Jews associated with the arrival of the kingdom. Perhaps the shelters were an invitation for the prophets to stay a while.

Something even more astounding happened next. “Then a cloud appeared and covered them, and a voice came from the cloud: “‘This is my Son, whom I love. Listen to Him!’” The cloud was not just above them — it ‘covered them’ in the sense of covering them up, as a dense fog, blocking their view.

And God tells us what is important: Jesus is the Son of God, loved by God, speaking the words of God. Even when the greatest prophets from Israel’s history are present, the disciples should listen to Jesus. Jesus is greater even than Moses and Elijah, and therefore greater than the Law and the Prophets. If He says that He is going to be their Messiah by dying in Jerusalem, then they should pay attention to what He says.



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True worship

Places of worship have always been held in great respect and awe by people in all parts of the world. During tours people have marveled at the beauty and majesty of churches, mosques and temples in different nations around the world. These structures are magnificent and are considered among the most beautiful places that people seek to visit. They include places like the Sultanahmet Mosque in Istanbul, the Golden Temple in Amristar, Beijing's Temple of Heaven, the Basilica Sagrada Familia in Barcelona and Moscow's St. Basil's Cathedral just to name a few. Every year tens of thousands of people travel to various holy sites to fulfill religious obligations. Many Christians seek to travel to Jerusalem to visit the Holy Sites and to walk in places where Jesus is said to have traveled according to the Bible. But what if we are constrained by financial and physical restrictions that prevent us from ever visiting or worshipping in the places of worship we adore? Many of us may never be able to afford to visit the holy land or worship in the ancient revered structures.

Here in Malaysia thousands of people make it a point to worship in specific places in order to fulfill vows and to seek blessings from God. Christians for example, head towards their local churches to pray, usually on Sundays. Some are so meticulous in their commitment to worship in these places every week that it is a top priority for them. It gives them a sense of fulfillment and closeness to God. Many swear by the blessings and favour that they have received as a result of their unflinching devotion to their chosen places of worship. However Jesus introduced a different perspective to the concept of worship.

Once Jesus on his way to Galilee, needed to go through Samaria. There he arrived at a city of Samaria called Sychar. Being wearied by the journey he sat by a well. A woman of Samaria came to draw water from the well and Jesus being thirsty asked her for a drink. The woman was surprised that Jesus being a Jew would ask her for a drink as Jews had no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."¹



by
Devaraj Ramoo

Jesus points out that the woman doesn't recognize the one who is asking for a drink because if she had known who Jesus really was, it is she who would be asking for the living water that only Jesus could give. He then proceeded to tell her that those who drank from the well would become thirsty again but whoever drank from the living water that he gave would never thirst again.² Jesus was not talking about the liquid water that we drink. He was referring to spiritual living water that only he could give and that would lead to eternal life.

The woman then asks for this living water but also tells Jesus that her ancestors worshipped God on a particular mountain whereas Jews worshipped God in Jerusalem. This is exactly how people respond even today when Jesus is introduced to them. They each would put forward their revered places of worship to indicate how they worship "their God".

To this Jesus reveals to us that the place of worship is less significant than how God the Father wanted to be worshipped. Jesus said, "Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."³

Simply put, it is not a place that constitutes true worship but an attitude of worship. God emphasizes a worship of spirit and truth where the person who comes to worship has humbled himself to worship as God desires to be worshipped. The Almighty God's desire is that we first accept his Son Jesus the Messiah who died for our sins by shedding his blood for humanity. When Jesus becomes a part of our

lives, then only can we begin to worship in spirit and truth. It is the Father's desire that we receive his Son in order to receive salvation, the gift that he has for every human being. And when we receive Jesus, both Jesus and the Father will become a part of our lives. For it is not where we worship that matters but who we have placed in our hearts that is the beginning of true worship. □

¹ John 4: 10

² John 4: 13-14

³ John 4: 23-24

The Heartbeat of Christ

Losing a child is every parent's worst nightmare, and it isn't often that we ever hear of any good coming from a tragedy like that. But for Anna Lewis, that's exactly what happened last year. The loss of her 31-year-old son to a car accident was transformed into a moment of incredible beauty. How? She heard her son's heart beating again, this time in the chest of Greg Robbins, a man who desperately needed a transplant to survive. Now, thanks to Anna's son, Greg has a new heart and a new chance at life.

The meeting was incredibly bittersweet, of course. But Anna found lasting comfort in the fact that her son gave life to another. His heartbeat, the same one that Anna no doubt had heard many times through his life as she raised him – was still echoing, but this time in the body of someone else. Her son's death had given another man new life.

That's a lot like the new life we're invited into through Christ. The offer of salvation really involves a real exchange: his life, for ours. Without him, we have no hope of spiritual life in personal union and communion with God through him. In fact, we all desperately need a spiritual 'heart transplant' so that we don't simply die a



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**



final death due to sin and alienation from God. And that's exactly what God promises us: "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 36:26 NIV).

But in order for this transplant to occur, Christ had to join himself to human nature and experience our death, so that his new and resurrected heart could live on through us and give us a perfectly right relationship of trusting love for God. Paul talks about it in second Corinthians: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV).

When we accept the free gift of salvation and enter into a personal, vital and growing relationship with the triune God, Christ's life becomes our own. And just like Anna, God hears the heartbeat of his own son echoing through us, and sees in us the same righteousness of Christ which he continually shares with us by the Spirit's dwelling in us.

So the next time you pause and listen to your heart, remember that it isn't just yours beating in there anymore – the heartbeat of Christ now echoes in you too! ☐

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"Suddenly, when they looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus." Peter had hoped to prolong the moment, but it was over. The event was not to get them in touch with past prophets, but for them to be more dedicated to the leader they had, because He was more than a prophet — He was the Son of God, and God had just validated the path that Jesus was on.

The glory they saw in Jesus no doubt encouraged them that the glorious kingdom would be a reality. But it was not just a future reality. Jesus had been the beloved Son of God all along, and His disciples should accept his teachings, even if they are the opposite of what they wanted and expected. Since He is the beloved Son of God, the disciples could be sure that glory would follow, even if dark days lay in the immediate future.

The Transfiguration also shows that God's kingdom transcends human kingdoms. God's reign is not just a bigger and better empire, and the leaders in the kingdom are not just kinder and stronger versions of Roman or Judean kings. The transformed face and clothes of Jesus show that it is far different; it is not just a continuation of normal history. Indeed, when the disciples catch even a small glimpse of the glory, they are frightened and don't even know how to speak intelligently. They had only a glimmer of understanding of what the kingdom really is.

So what should the disciples do?

They should listen to Jesus, get behind Jesus and follow Him. They should not take matters into their own hands, because their efforts are as useless as making shelters for glorified beings.

But what about Elijah? (verses 9-13)

"You had to be there," the saying goes. But in this case, it didn't do a lot of good to 'be there'. "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what 'rising from the dead' meant."

Jesus had predicted His own death and resurrection, but the truth was so contrary to what the disciples expected that they couldn't understand the plainest of words. It was only after Jesus rose from the dead that they could begin to understand — but until that understanding came, they would not be able to tell the story right. So Jesus told them to keep it a secret until the time was right.

The Transfiguration gave them a glimpse of the glory that Jesus had, and the glory He would share with all who took up the cross to follow Him into the valley of the shadow of death. ☐

- 1 Mark 9:1-13
- 2 Matthew 12:28
- 3 Acts 2:1-4
- 4 Mark 10:37

The Good Christian

by
Tammy Tkach

During the time I was on a bowling team, I tried to follow the cardinal rule of maintaining peace: don't discuss politics or religion. From time to time, these subjects did come up and occasionally I couldn't help chiming in. One of those times was when my Christian teammate, who smoked, drank and cussed, expressed to me that she wasn't a good Christian. I told her a Christian is neither good nor bad; one is either a Christian or not. She looked at me as if I were speaking Polish and the conversation ended.

Along with the idea of good and bad Christians comes the notion that if you're not good enough, you won't make it into heaven. These two beliefs seem to permeate Christian thought, even though grace is liberally sprinkled throughout most Christian teaching and writing. But, according to the New Covenant, these can't coexist. It's either grace or works. Then why do we find both beliefs side by side in most people's minds?

It started with one of Satan's oldest and best tools: mix truth and lies, which makes the grace-plus belief go down as easy as a dark chocolate truffle. Then you add the amazing ability of human beings to believe two opposing ideas at the same time, known as cognitive dissonance, and you have the whole world, even non-Christians, believing everyone has to be good enough to please God. Christians, who know from Ephesians 2:8-9 that we are saved by grace,



are often convinced of this fallacy too. It's even taught to children in the guise of a Santa Claus song, which means it's ingrained almost from birth.

Part of the confusion may also come when humanly we try to reconcile the true meaning of grace with our misguided, self-righteous concept of justice. How can God pardon everyone of everything? To us, there must be some kind of punishment or at least consequences. Even Christians struggle with complete forgiveness. Perhaps we aren't capable of it. The Holy Spirit can help us forgive but only God can truly forgive and forget.

Another problem is misunderstanding how grace and works go together. Paul put it plainly when he said we show our faith by our works. They go hand in hand but not always the way we think. Grace leads to good works because of gratitude and understanding of how much we're loved.

I guess the bottom line is in human thinking, none of it makes sense, because from our perspective, grace violates God's standards of righteousness. Of course it does! But to God, it makes perfect sense and is the only way to deal with sin and death—complete forgiveness, unlimited grace and mercy with no strings attached. That means we don't have to worry about being good enough. All we have to do is trust God's goodness.☐

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At the same time, realize that mega-faith does not originate with us. It's natural for us to have feelings of weakness. Jesus is the author of real mega-faith, so don't be reluctant to ask for it—he shares his mega-faith with us! Like the Canaanite woman, simply kneel and ask him for help. The sheer act of praying for faith is an expression of faith.

Because we are not fault-free, we may experience reality checks that confront us with unpleasant facts about ourselves. Resist prideful reactions. Instead, humbly admit the truth, accept the facts, and objectively consider who we really are—sinners, broken, in need!

Remember to take comfort in the word of God, its covenant and promises. Knowing the plan that the triune God has for us heartens and reassures us to press forward, without withdrawal, knowing that faith requires patience, persistence and endurance.

And then, we wait for our Lord's gracious answer.

Conclusion

The Gospel accounts do not suggest that many followers of Jesus had mega-faith. In fact, Matthew records more than one conversation between Jesus and his disciples in which he described their faith as "little".⁸ Jesus wanted his target audience to believe strongly, but it seemed that the extraordinary examples of faith, even those that astonished Jesus, came from Gentiles such as the centurion at Capernaum⁹ and this Canaanite woman. Those considered marginal or outsiders by the more religions types can take courage—Jesus sees them through different eyes.

The Holy Spirit inspired two of the Gospel writers to include this story as an example of faith and God's grace. As we grow in knowing Jesus, and in that knowledge expect the grace of God to be generously poured out upon us, we will increasingly open ourselves to that grace that comes to us from the Father, through the Son and by the Spirit.

Amen!☐

- 1 Matthew 1:1
- 2 Matthew 1:16
- 3 Matthew 2:1
- 4 Matthew 2:2
- 5 Matthew 10:5
- 6 Matthew 28:19
- 7 Psalms 121:2
- 8 Matthew. 6:30; 17:20
- 9 Matthew 8:10

The wonder of God's grace!

Review 4 of James B. Torrance' book:
Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace

by
Ted Johnston

Through the incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, our humanity has been re-created. This stunning gift of God's grace was accomplished on our behalf, not merely through *what Jesus did* (though it includes that), but by and through *who Jesus is*--the God-man who in his vicarious humanity stands in for and represents us all. As JB likes to say, *Jesus is the one and the many*. In order to do for us what we could never do for ourselves, the eternal Son of God became fully human. In doing so, he assumed our fallen humanity (not some other type of human nature) so that we "might be turned back to God, in him by his sinless life in the Spirit and through him in us." *Oh, the wonder of God's grace!*

To understand and appreciate who Jesus Christ is for us, as one of us, it's vital to grasp the nature of our Lord's dual *mediatorial* role. As God, Jesus acted on God's behalf in the *God-humanward* direction. As human, he acted on humanity's behalf in the *human-Godward* direction. Whereas Christians readily acknowledge the former, they frequently overlook (or at least minimize) the latter. Though seeing Jesus coming to us bearing God's forgiveness (justification), they fail to see Jesus responding back to God as our representative and substitute. As a result, sanctification is viewed largely our own responsibility (albeit with the Spirit's help) with our own faith, repentance and obedience being the only human-Godward movement at play. JB decries this mistaken viewpoint:

It does not do full justice to the meaning of grace, for it *short-circuits the vicarious humanity of Christ*. Grace does not only mean that in the coming of Jesus Christ, God gives himself in holy love to humanity. It also means the coming of God as man, to do for us as a man what we cannot do for ourselves - to present us in himself through the eternal Spirit to the Father. In other words, the human-Godward movement, in which we are given to participate (as in worship and communion), is given freely and unconditionally. *Our response in faith and obedience is a response to the response already made for us by Christ to the Father's holy love*, a response we are summoned to make in union with Christ.... [Calvin, in alignment with the Greek fathers, understood] that "*all parts of our salvation are already complete in Christ*" in virtue of [Christ's] obedience for us, and that we are summoned to a life of "union with Christ" to become in ourselves what we already are in Christ our head.

JB makes an important distinction between what Calvin (following the teaching of the Greek fathers) refers to in his writings as "legal repentance" and "evangelical repentance." Whereas legal repentance says "Repent, and if you do you will be forgiven," evangelical repentance says "Christ has borne your sins on the cross; therefore receive God's forgiveness in repentance." Repentance (our response) does not condition God into being gracious - no, forgiveness

precedes repentance. As the New Testament clearly shows, we repent not in order to be forgiven, but because we are forgiven (already). JB explains this priority (in time and importance) of grace by noting that the *indicative* ("you are forgiven") precedes the *imperative* ("repent"). "Repentance" says JB, "is our response to grace, not a condition of grace." It is the goodness (grace) of God that leads us to repentance.

Because we hear (and receive) the word of forgiveness and love already spoken by the Father (a word that, by its very nature, includes God's judgment on us as being guilty of sin), we respond in humble submission, gratefully receiving God's gift of forgiveness in Christ. Of course, our response of faith and repentance is imperfect, but what we cannot do (respond perfectly to God), Jesus, in his vicarious humanity, has done already for us (on our behalf) by perfectly submitting to the Father. JB comments:

That is the wonder of God's grace! God not only speaks the word of forgiveness to us, He also provides for us one, in Jesus Christ, who makes the perfect response of vicarious penitence. So God accepts us, not because of our repentance - we have no worthy penitence to offer - but in the person of one who has already said "amen" for us, in death, to the divine condemnation of our sin - in atonement.

What then is the place of our faith and repentance? They are our *response* to grace, not a *condition* of grace. This response is the Spirit's gift to us, allowing us to participate in the vicarious repentance of Christ - his self-offering to the Father on our behalf as our High Priest. As JB notes, "God's grace is unconditionally free, but it summons us to receive it unconditionally in faith and penitence, in love and obedience."

Though most Christians rightly understand that it is by grace that we are forgiven (justified), many (erroneously) believe that we take it from there - we grow up in Christ (are sanctified, in that sense) through our own effort. But the gospel truth is that justification, sanctification and glorification are all by grace, which is to say that they are accomplished by, in and through Christ on our behalf. As God, Christ forgives us, and as human (through his vicarious humanity), Christ sanctifies, then glorifies us.

When we fail to understand the dual, mediatorial role of Christ (and rely upon it), we inevitably take our eyes off Jesus - off his worship and offering to God on our behalf. When that happens we are "thrown back on ourselves" (as JB likes to put it) relying upon our own feeble efforts - our own worship ("religion") - instead of relying on Christ. Decrying this unfortunate situation, JB makes this impassioned declaration:

There is no more urgent need in our churches today than to recover the Trinitarian nature of grace - that it is by grace alone, through the gift of Jesus Christ in the

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Sayings by Richard Rohr

Christianity is not about avoiding punishment or gaining reward. It is about loving God and loving what God loves. And what God loves is the whole of creation.

The divine DNA is in everyone and everything God has created "from the beginning." As humans, we are graced with the capacity to realize this, fully enjoy it, and draw mightily from it.

When we call something sacred, we normally mean that it connects us directly to the divine, to the transcendent, to our soul, or quite simply to God.

The people who know God well—mystics, hermits, prayerful people, those who risk everything to find God—always meet a lover, not a dictator.

When we fail we are merely joining the great parade of humanity that has walked ahead of us and will follow after us.

All great spirituality teaches about letting go of what you don't need and who you are not. Then, when you can get little enough and naked enough and poor enough, you'll find that the little place where you really are is ironically more than enough and is all that you need. At that place, you will have nothing to prove to anybody and nothing to protect. That place is called freedom. It's the freedom of the children of God. Such people can connect with everybody. They don't feel the need to eliminate anybody.

You come to God not by being strong, but by being weak; not by being right, but through your mistakes.

The human ego prefers anything, just about anything, to falling, or changing, or dying. The ego is that part of you that loves the status quo – even when it's not working. It attaches to past and present and fears the future.

Pain that is not transformed is transmitted.

When you haven't found inner meaning, you will always substitute outer performance. It's the only way to fill that void, that sense of significance - that I am significant. So almost the degree of outer performance can, in many cases, mirror the lack of inner alignment.

I have committed myself to joy. I have come to realize that those who make space for joy, those who prefer nothing to joy, those who desire the utter reality, will most assuredly have it. We must not be afraid to announce it to refugees, slum dwellers, saddened prisoners, angry prophets. Now and then we must even announce it to ourselves. In this prison of now, in this cynical and sophisticated age, someone must believe in joy.

God comes to us disguised as our life.

Honest and humble self-critical thinking is necessary to see one's own shadow and usually well-hidden narcissism. Only when I encounter my shadow do I realize that my biggest problem is me!

The dualistic mind presumes that if you criticize something, you don't love it. Wise people like the prophets would say the opposite.

A prophet is one who keeps God free for people and who keeps people free for God.

"A prophet is someone who listens attentively to the word of God, a contemplative, a mystic who hears God and takes God at God's word, and then goes into the world to tell the world God's message." (John Dear)

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Spirit that we can enter into and live a life of communion with God our Father.

Jesus, for us, as one of us, is the one true worshipper, the one faithful and obedient child of God, who alone fulfills God's righteous requirements for humanity. That being the case, it is in and through him (and only in and through him) that we may draw near to God (having been brought near to God in him). Thus worship is God's gift of grace to us in Christ. And that is why all of our acts of obedience-worship (e.g. baptism, Eucharist, prayer, etc.) must be seen as ordinances of grace. Rather than what we do to earn (or in some other way secure) God's grace, they are ways by which we celebrate and thus "live into" (receive, in gratitude) the grace of God that already is ours in Jesus Christ, by the Spirit. JB comments:

God comes to us as man in Jesus Christ to stand in for us, pray for us, teach us to pray and lead our prayers. God in grace gives us what he seeks from us - a life of

prayer - in giving us Jesus Christ and the Spirit. So Christ is very God, the God to whom we pray. And he is very man, the man who prays for us and with us....

Grace means that God gives himself to us as God, freely and unconditionally, to be worshiped and adored. But grace also means that God comes to us in Jesus Christ as man, to do for us and in us what we cannot do. He offers a life of perfect obedience and worship and prayer to the Father, that we might be drawn by the Spirit into communion with the Father, "through Jesus Christ our Lord."

From start to finish - justification through sanctification, all the way to glorification - our salvation is by, in and through Jesus Christ, the "one for the many." This is the truth, the stunning reality, *the wonder of Gods' grace!* Let us embrace it (and be embraced by it) and in doing so, find life! Amen. ☐

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