

THE Plain Truth

MCI (P) 022/05/2019

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jul - Sep 2019



Your invitation to the Kingdom of God. P. 07

Can religion become idol? P. 17

Praise and Thanksgiving. P. 21

**Free
Copy!**

THE PLAIN TRUTH

ISSN 1675-3100



9 771675 310008

PP 12578/03/2013 (032108)

Jesus the Christ

Some assume *Christ* is the last name of *Jesus*. Some assume *Jesus* and *Christ* are synonymous and interchangeable names. How do we understand these two names?

Definitions

Jesus means *Saviour*. *Jesus* came 2000 years ago as a *human* to save humans from sin and death. *Jesus* thus has a *beginning* (but no end).

Christ means *Anointed, Chosen, Messiah, Redeemer, Eternal, King* and *Lord*.¹ *Christ* has *no beginning* (and no end). God the Father *chose/anointed* his Son to save humans. The Son came as the *human Jesus* for this purpose.

That translates to: *Jesus Christ = Saviour Anointed*.

His name before creation

The Triune God - Father, *Son* and Holy Spirit – has eternally existed as three *distinct* Persons in dynamic *love relationship* that is intimate, joyful and glorious. All three Persons of the Godhead are one in essence, heart, mind and will. They are *never* separated - lest there will be no God. (Some mistakenly believe that the Father abandoned his Son at the cross.)

This article is about God's *Son*, the second Person in the Godhead, also known as the *Word/Logos of God, Almighty, Eternal* and *Everlasting God*.

God created the universe (cosmos) to *reveal* and *express himself in and through his creation*. He created matter to manifest his glory and majesty. He also created humans in his image and likeness to reveal and express (manifest) himself in and through them *uniquely* as each. That was God's original purpose, and it still is.

His name at creation

The *Word (Son of God)* created all things. Apostle John tells us: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*. He was in the beginning with God. *All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.*"²

Apostle Paul also echoes the same truth: "*He [the Word] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*"³ Nothing exists outside of him. *He is all and in all.*"⁴

The author of Hebrews likewise echoes: "...in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, *whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.*"⁵

His name in Old Testament times

There is no mention of *Jesus, Christ*, or *Jesus Christ*



By
Dr. P. Sellappan

in the Old Testament. These names appear only in the New Testament.

The Old Testament prophets prophesied that God would send a *Messiah (Redeemer)* to rescue Israel from their slavery. The Jews (and the Samaritans) were waiting for that *Messiah* to appear. For example:

- Andrew told his brother Peter, "We have found the *Messiah* (that is, *the Christ*)."⁶
- The Samaritan woman at the well told Jesus: "I know that *Messiah* (called *Christ*) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."⁷ Her country folks also testified "...this man really is the *Saviour* of the world."⁸

They knew *Messiah* as *the Christ* and *Christ* as *the Messiah*, but not *Messiah/Christ* as *Jesus*.

His name in the Gospels

Jesus is the *human* name of *Christ*. People knew *Jesus* by his human name, not by his title *Christ*. That is why *Jesus* appears more frequently than *Christ* in the gospels.

Very few knew *Jesus* as *the Christ*, but some did by revelation. For example:

- Peter confessed, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Jesus told Peter, "Flesh and blood did not *reveal* this to you, but my Father who is in heaven". Jesus commanded his disciples not to tell anyone that He was the *Christ* because his hour (to die) has not yet come.
- When Jesus cast out demons, they cried, "*You are the Christ, the Son of God!*" Jesus rebuked and did *not* allow them to speak, for *they knew that He was the Christ*.

The Jews generally knew Jesus as man (as son of Joseph and Mary), but not as *Messiah, Saviour, Christ, or Son of God*.

The Pharisees, scribes and lawyers were not angry with the *human Jesus*. However, whenever people called *Jesus Christ, Messiah* or *Son of God*, they got angry. They got angry when Jesus claimed that he was the Son of God. They got angry when he told them, "Before Abraham was I AM. They got angry. When he told them: "I and my Father are one...I do only as the Father tells me to do".

One of their accusations was: *He calls Himself as Christ, a King.*¹⁰

The high priest questioned Jesus, "*Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God!*"¹¹

Pilate asked them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or *Jesus who is called Christ?* What then shall I do with *Jesus who is called Christ?*"¹² When Pilate asked Jesus, "*Are you the king of the Jews?*"

Continues on page 6

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding



7



12



15



17



21

Issue No. 16	Volume No. 30
Jul - Sep 2019	PP 12578/03/2013 (032108)
Editor	Dr. P. Sellappan
Managing Editor	Low Mong Chai
Co-ordinator	Susan Low
Editorial & Advisory Committee	Eugene Guzon Devaraj Ramoo Daniel Zachariah Wong Mein Kong Joseph Zachariah
Design	Ravi K Alamothu

Malaysia
Office Address: No.98, Jalan Zapin 3A/KU5, Mutiara Point (off Jalan Meru), Bandar Bukit Raja, Batu Belah, 41050 Klang, Selangor
Postal Address: P. O. Box 2043, Pusat Bisnes Bukit Raja, Pos Malaysia Bhd., 40800 Shah Alam.

Website: www.gci-malaysia.org
Email: ptasiamy@gmail.com

Singapore
Jurong Point Post Office, P.O. Box 054, Singapore 916402

The Plain Truth is published four times a year as funds allow, and is sponsored by Grace Communion International, which is a member of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia. It follows a non-denominational editorial policy and provides a message of practical help, hope and encouragement from a Christian perspective. - For Non-Muslims Only -

DONATIONS: Although we do not put any subscription price for The Plain Truth, we gratefully welcome donations from readers who support our desire to bring spiritual knowledge and understanding to our fellow brothers and sisters. Cheques should be made payable to 'The Plain Truth' and mailed to the postal address listed above.

Printed in Malaysia by:
Hin Press & Trading Sdn Bhd (71078-D)
No. PT 45855, Batu 2, Jalan Kapar,
41400 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia

ISSN 1675-3100. Copyright Grace Communion International, 2019.

cover story

05 The second coming of Jesus Christ.
He will come in unexpected ways!

articles

07 Your invitation to the Kingdom of God.
It is an open invitation with no strings attached!

10 Moving forward.
Set your eyes on what really matters.

11 Can the dead live again?
Resurrection is our hope.

12 Already saved, being saved, will be saved.
Correct interpretation clears misunderstanding.

15 Taking care of business.
Share the gospel.

17 Can religion become idol?
Jesus calls us to love others as he has loved us.

19 The power of giving and receiving.
That is the true model of all living.

20 The Word of God.
Guides our life.

21 Praise and Thanksgiving.
Can transform our life.

22 Is Jesus the only way of salvation?
Yes, Jesus is your salvation.

regular features

02 Editorial

04 What our readers say

23 Hmm...

What our readers say:

Hello, there! I am one of the readers of the Plain Truth magazine. I have benefitted so much from reading it. It is a very good magazine telling God's purpose for our life! It gives fresh perspectives of the gospel. Thank you!

**Tun Thidar
Singapore**

I like to get a free subscription to the Plain Truth magazine. I understand that I can cancel the subscription anytime.

**Lee Meng Choon
Singapore**

The Plain Truth is good, and I would like to subscribe to it and share with others.

**Jay Lee
Petaling Jaya**

I like to subscribe to 5 copies of the Plain Truth and other periodicals from you. Would appreciate if you could kindly oblige. Thanks.

**Mark Ho
Petaling Jaya**

Hi, I am interested in your lovely magazine. Please add my name to your mailing list.

**Stella Junus
Singapore**

I would like to subscribe to 5 copies of the Plain Truth magazine. Thanks.

**Alvin Yeow
Petaling Jaya**

I am interested in reading the Plain Truth regularly. Please send me 5 copies. Thanks!

**Darren Lim
Petaling Jaya**

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

**Subramaniam Paul
Seremban**

I read The Plain Truth magazine borrowed from my neighbour and I love the contents. Besides, I want to improve my understanding of Christianity.

**Ruzita Sudiah
Kota Marudu**

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**

As a Christian, I am learning more about God, the church, and moral values. Some of the articles are very touching and I gain a lot from them. I pass the magazine to others, so they too can read it. I am making a small contribution of RM100. Hope it helps. God bless the Plain Truth ministry.

**Looi Chun Cheong
Taiping**

Ed: We are happy to hear that this magazine is helping you. That certainly encourages us. Thank you for your generous contribution.

The articles are enlightening and inspiring for they reveal the presence of God in all walks of life across the globe.

**Stephen Tung
Petaling Jaya**

The articles are so inspiring; they uplift my spirit when I am down. May God Almighty bless The Plain Truth and all who serve and contribute to it!

**Geh Cheng Lok
Penang**

The evangelistic material in The Plain Truth are indeed "plain and simple" as the title implies. I greatly appreciate the magazine. The articles comfort and strengthen my faith. I derive much blessing through reading it; it has been a source of inspiration to me. It provides spiritual nourishment for the soul and draws us closer to the living God. Praise the Lord.

**W T William
Kulai**

I am very impressed with the magazine which I borrowed from my friend. I wish to have these copies for myself too. Please send copies of this magazine to me. The topics discussed are very relevant to our day-to-day life and they strengthen my faith.

**Mary Vincent
Taiping**

Grateful if you could keep me on the mailing list for the Plain Truth – grateful to receive the January 2019 issue and onwards.

**Susan McKenzie
Singapore**

The Plain Truth inspires me. It has been 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, I pass on to others.

**Dr. Daisy Arianayagam,
Sungei Petani**

The Plain Truth is spiritually enlightening and helps to spread the Good News to my patients too. A very small contribution to continue your good work.

**Dr. Shanta Oommen,
Kuala Lumpur**

I am using The Plain Truth in my small group meetings in my church. It is helping me to be more courteous towards people, and obedient to my parents.

**Jagdeesh Sandhu
Klang**

The The Plain Truth articles help me to understand the Word of God better and its relevance to our daily living.

**Kathryn Ooi Choo Lian
Singapore**

Although THE PLAIN TRUTH is sent free of charge, it is not without cost. Each copy is made possible by the generosity of others. So we are very grateful for those readers who send a donation, and make it possible for us to continue to publish the good news of the Gospel. Donations should be sent to the addresses listed on page 3 or sent electronically to the bank account:

The Plain Truth
A/C No: 8001-8514-59
CIMB BANK BHD
Jalan Dato Hamzah (Branch)
12-14 Jalan Dato Hamzah
41700 Klang,
Selangor, MALAYSIA.

We welcome your comments. Letters for this section should be addressed to:
"Letters to the Editor", The Plain Truth, P.O. Box 2043, Pusat Bisnes Bukit Raja, Pos Malaysia Bhd., 40800 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.
or sent via electronic mail to:
ptasiamy@gmail.com
The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space.

The Second Coming of Jesus Christ

What do you think would be the biggest event that could occur on the world scene? Another world war? The discovery of a cure for some dreaded disease? World peace, once and for all? Contact with some extra-terrestrial intelligence?

For millions of Christians, the answer to this question is simple: The biggest event that could ever occur is the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The Bible's message

The story of the Bible centers on the coming of Jesus Christ as Savior and King. As described in Genesis 3, the first human sinned and fractured their relationship with God. But God foretold the coming of a Redeemer who would repair that spiritual break. To the serpent who tempted Adam and Eve to sin, God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."¹

This is the Bible's earliest prophecy of a Savior who would smash the power that sin and death hold over humans ("he will crush your head"). How? By the sacrificial death of the Savior ("you will strike his heel"). Jesus accomplished this at his first coming. John the Baptist recognized him as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"²

The Bible reveals the central importance of God becoming flesh at the first coming of Jesus Christ. The Bible also reveals that Jesus is coming now, in the lives of believers. The Bible also states that he will come again, visibly and in power. Jesus Christ comes in three ways:

Jesus has already come

We humans need God's redemption — his rescue — because we have all sinned, earning death. Jesus redeemed us by dying in our place. Paul wrote:

God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him

By Grace
Communion
International

[Jesus Christ], and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.³

Jesus healed the breach that occurred in the Garden of Eden. Through his sacrifice, the human family is reconciled to God.

Old Testament prophecy pointed to the kingdom of God. The New Testament opens with Jesus "proclaiming the good news of God's kingdom. 'The time has come.... The kingdom of God is near,'" he said.⁴ Jesus, the King of the kingdom, was walking with humans! Jesus offered "for all time one sacrifice for sins."⁵ We should never underestimate the importance of Jesus' incarnation, life and work 2,000 years ago.

Jesus came.

Jesus is coming now

There is good news for those who believe in Christ: "You were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world.... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions."⁶

God has raised us with Christ, spiritually, now! Through his grace, "God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus." This passage describes our present condition as followers of Jesus Christ.

People asked Jesus when the kingdom of God would come. He replied: "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you."⁷ Jesus Christ brought the kingdom in his person. Jesus lives within Christians.⁸ As he now lives

in us, he extends the influence of the kingdom of God. Jesus' coming to live in us also anticipates the ultimate revelation of the kingdom on earth at Jesus' second coming.

Why does Jesus live in us now? "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God — not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."⁹ God has saved us by grace, through no effort of our own. Although works cannot earn us salvation, Jesus lives in us so that we may now do good works and thereby glorify God.

Jesus came.

Jesus will come again

After Jesus' resurrection, as his disciples watched him ascend to heaven, two angels asked: "Why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven."¹⁰ Jesus will return.

At his first coming, Jesus left some messianic predictions unfulfilled. This was one reason many Jews rejected him. They thought the Messiah would be a national hero who would free them from Roman domination. But the Messiah was to come, first, to die for all humanity. Only later would he return as a conquering king, and then not just to exalt Israel, but to claim all earth's kingdoms as his own. "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."¹¹

"I am going...to prepare a place for you," Jesus told his disciples. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."¹² Later, the apostle Paul told the church how "the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of

Continued from page 2

Jesus replied, "It is as you say."¹³ On hearing this, the angry mob demanded Pilate to crucify Jesus.

Acknowledging Jesus as *Christ (Messiah), Son of God or King* would mean they had to submit, obey and worship Him, which they were not prepared to do.

His name after ascension

After Jesus' ascension, the apostles preached *Jesus as the Christ*.¹⁴ They were not afraid to preach *Jesus as Lord, King, Saviour and Son of God*. For example:

Peter preached, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is *no other name [Christ]* under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."¹⁵

Paul preached *Jesus as the Son of God*.¹⁶ He preached *Christ* crucified.¹⁷

The book of *Revelation unveils [reveals]* Jesus' identity — *Eternal, Immortal, Son of God, King of kings and Lord of lords*.¹⁸

The resurrected and ascended Christ tells us: "I am the *First and the Last*¹⁹ ...I am the *Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End*."²⁰

- 1 Genesis 3:15
- 2 John 1:29
- 3 Colossians 1:19-20
- 4 Mark 1:14-15
- 5 Hebrews 10:12
- 6 Ephesians 2:1-2, 4-5
- 7 Luke 17:20-21
- 8 Galatians 2:20
- 9 Ephesians 2:8-10
- 10 Acts 1:11
- 11 Revelation 11:15
- 12 John 14:23
- 13 1 Thessalonians 4:16
- 14 1 Corinthians 15:51-54
- 15 Matthew 24:44
- 16 Matthew 10:22
- 17 Philippians 3:21
- 18 Romans 8:21
- 19 Revelation 22:20

- 1 Psalm 45:7, Isaiah 42:1; 61:1, Daniel 9:25, Zechariah 14:9
- 2 John 1:1-3
- 3 Colossians 1:15-17
- 4 Colossians 3:11
- 5 Hebrews 1:1-3
- 6 John 1:41
- 7 John 4:25
- 8 John 4:42
- 9 Matthew 16:13-20
- 10 Luke 23:2
- 11 Matthew 26:63
- 12 Mathew 27:17-22
- 13 Luke 23:3
- 14 Acts 2:36, 5:42
- 15 Acts 4:12
- 16 Acts 9:20
- 17 1 Corinthians 1:23-30
- 18 Revelation 1:1; 19:16
- 19 Revelation. 1:17-18
- 20 Revelation 22:13

the archangel and with the trumpet call of God."¹³ At Christ's return, he will raise to immortality the righteous dead and change to immortality the faithful who are still alive, and they will all meet him in the air.¹⁴

But when?

Throughout the centuries, speculation about the second coming has caused uncounted arguments — and untold disappointment when various predictions failed. Overemphasizing the *when* of Jesus' return can divert our minds from the central focus of the gospel — Jesus' saving work for all humans, accomplished in his life, death, resurrection and continuing work as our heavenly High Priest. We can become so engrossed in prophetic speculation that we fail to fulfill the rightful role of Christians as witnesses to the world, exemplifying the loving, merciful, Christ-like way of life and sharing the good news of salvation.

Our focus

If knowing when Christ will return is not possible (and therefore, by comparison to what the Bible does tell us, unimportant), then where should we focus our energies as Christians? Our focus should be on being ready for Jesus' second coming whenever it occurs! "You also must be ready," Jesus said, "because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."¹⁵ "He who stands firm to the end will be saved."¹⁶ The whole Bible revolves around Jesus Christ. As Christians, our lives should revolve around him, too.

Jesus came. He is coming through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit now. Jesus Christ will come again in glory to "transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."¹⁷ Then, "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God."¹⁸ I am coming soon, says our Savior. As Christians, disciples of Jesus Christ, we all can reply in unison: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."¹⁹

What does Jesus Christ mean to us?

Jesus, the Christ, is Infinite, Almighty, Omniscience, Omnipresent, and all-wise. He is both immanent (present in the creation) and transcendent (exists outside of the creation). He is much higher, wider and deeper than what we think or imagine. He is bigger than our concepts, ideas and the Bible. He is all and in all. As His Spirit reveals, we get to know and experience more of Him. We will be discovering him in new and surprising ways throughout all eternity. We can never exhaust our understanding of Him.

Jesus Christ alone can save us for He alone was chosen/ordained to save humans.

Acknowledging Jesus Christ as God, King, Lord and Saviour means we joyfully submit to His lordship over us. He is not only our Lord and Master, but He is also our self-giving Elder Brother. Unlike many human rulers, Jesus Christ is a benevolent, merciful and gracious Lord, King, Ruler and Brother who desires to share His all with us - all that He is (His life) and all that He has (the vast universe). What a privilege we have to participate, co-create, and rule with Him as His dear brothers and sisters for all eternity!

Your invitation to the Kingdom of God



Everyone has some concept of right and wrong, and everyone has done something wrong even by his or her own definition. “To err is human,” says a common proverb. Everyone has betrayed a friend, broken a promise or hurt someone’s feelings. Everyone has experienced the feeling of guilt. People therefore want God to stay away from them. They know they cannot stand before God with a clear conscience. They know they should obey him, and they also know that they have not. They are ashamed and guilty.

How can their guilt be erased? How can the conscience be cleared? “To forgive is divine,” the proverb concludes. God himself will forgive. Many people know the proverb, but somehow do not believe that God is divine enough to forgive their sins. They still feel guilty. They still fear the appearance of God and the day of judgment.

However, God has already appeared — in the person of Jesus Christ. He did not come to condemn, but to save. He brought a message of forgiveness, and he died on a cross to guarantee that we may be forgiven. The message of Jesus, the message of the cross, is good news for all who feel their guilt. Jesus, the divine human, has died for us. Forgiveness is given freely to all.

We need this message of good news! Christ’s gospel brings peace of mind, happiness and personal victory.

The true gospel is really good news. It’s the gospel the apostles preached: Jesus Christ and him crucified.¹ Jesus Christ is our hope of glory,² the resurrection from the dead, the message of hope and salvation for humanity — this is the gospel of the kingdom of God that Jesus preached!

Good news for all people

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”³

This good news Jesus Christ brought is known as the gospel. It is a potent, life-changing and life-

By Neil Earle

transforming message. The gospel not only convicts and converts, it will eventually confound all who stand against it. The messenger not only brought good news about salvation—by his death on the cross, he brought salvation itself. Then, the announcement was not just about the future—it was about something that had already begun.

The gospel is “the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). The gospel is our invitation from God to live on an altogether different plane. It is good news of a future inheritance to be given in full when Christ returns. But it is also an invitation to an invigorating spiritual reality that can be ours here and now.

Paul describes the gospel as “the gospel of Christ,”⁴ “the gospel of God,”⁵ “the gospel of peace.”⁶ Paul took his cue from Jesus and began to redefine the Jewish view of the kingdom of God around the universal significance of Christ’s first appearing.

The *New Dictionary of Theology* explains Paul’s writing thus, “the preacher [Christ] becomes the preached one.” The Jesus who walked the dusty roads of Judea and Galilee, Paul taught, is now the resurrected Christ who sits at the right hand of God, and who is “the head over every power and authority.”⁷

In the gospel according to Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were “of first importance,” the key events in God’s plan.⁸ The gospel was good news for the poor and downtrodden. History was going somewhere. Right, not might, would ultimately triumph. The pierced hand had triumphed over the iron fist. The kingdom of evil was being replaced by the reign of Jesus Christ, an order of things that Christians already experienced in part.

Paul stressed this aspect of the gospel to the Colossians:

Giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the

dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.¹⁰

For weary Christians in all ages, the gospel is both a present reality and a future hope. The resurrected Christ, who presides over time, space and everything that happens here below, is the Christian's champion. The One who ascended into the heavenly realms is the ever-present source of power.¹¹

The good news is that Jesus Christ triumphed over every obstacle during his earthly life. The way of the cross is the rough but triumphant road into the kingdom of God. That is why Paul could summarize the gospel: "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

The great reversal

When Jesus appeared in Galilee earnestly preaching the gospel, he expected a response. He expects a response today.

But Jesus' original invitation to enter the kingdom was not received in a vacuum. Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God, accompanied by impressive signs and wonders, electrified a nation chafing under the Roman Empire. This is one reason Jesus had to clarify what he meant by the kingdom of God.

The Jews in Jesus' day were looking for a strongman to restore their nation to the glory days of David and Solomon. But Jesus' message was "doubly revolutionary," in the words of British scholar N.T. Wright. For one thing, Jesus took the popular expectation of a Jewish super-state throwing off the Roman yoke, and transformed it. He turned the widespread hope of political salvation into a message of spiritual deliverance: the gospel!

Theologian Wright puts it this way: "The kingdom of God is here, *but it's not like you thought it was going to be.*"

Jesus shocked people with what his good news implied. "Many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first," Jesus emphasized.¹² "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth," he told his own people, the Jews, "when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out."¹³ The great banquet was for everyone.¹⁴ The Gentiles were invited to the kingdom, too.

And one thing more, something just as revolutionary. This prophet from Nazareth seemed to have a lot of time for the disenfranchised — from lepers and physically disadvantaged folk to money-grabbing tax collectors — and sometimes even the hated Roman oppressors.

The good news Jesus brought upset everyone's assumptions, even those of his own disciples.¹⁵ Jesus insisted that the kingdom they looked for as a future event was already dynamically present in his ministry. As he said after one dramatic episode: "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."¹⁶ Those who saw Jesus in action, in other words, were experiencing the presence of the future.

Jesus turned popular expectation on its head in at least three ways:

1. Jesus taught the good news that the kingdom comes as a pure gift — the reign of God bringing healing in its wake. Jesus inaugurated "the year of the Lord's favour."¹⁷ But the people getting into the kingdom were the weary and the burdened, the poor and the beggars, repentant tax collectors and harlots, and children and social outcasts. To social outcasts and spiritually lost sheep, Jesus proclaimed himself their shepherd.
2. Jesus' good news was also for those willing to turn to God through repentance. They would find God to be like a generous father who scans the horizon for his wandering sons and daughters and spots them "while...still a long way off."¹⁸ The good news of the gospel meant that anyone saying the words, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner,"¹⁹ and really meaning it, would find God a sympathetic listener. Always. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you."²⁰ To those who believed, this was the best news they could ever hear.
3. Jesus' gospel also meant that, despite all appearances to the contrary, nothing could stop the triumph of the kingdom Jesus Christ had inaugurated. Though that kingdom would meet fierce and unrelenting resistance, it would ultimately triumph in supernatural power and splendour.

Christ told his disciples: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."²¹

Jesus' gospel message had a tension between the "already" and the "not yet." The gospel of the kingdom referred to a rule of God that was already active — "the blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor."²²

But the kingdom was "not yet" in the sense that its full consummation still lay ahead. To understand the gospel is to appreciate this twofold aspect — the interval between the promised presence of the King who lives inside his people now and his dramatic reappearance.

The gospel of your salvation

Paul the missionary helped initiate the second great movement of the gospel — its expansion from tiny Judea into the sophisticated Greco-Roman world of the middle first century. He focused the blazing light of the gospel through the prism of day-to-day living. He tapped into the practical implications of the gospel as he exalted the glorified Christ.

Paul shared with his fellow Christians the breath-taking significance of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Once you were alienated from God and were

enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation — if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.²³

Reconciliation. Without blemish. Grace. Deliverance. Forgiveness. Not just in the future, but here and now. That was Paul's gospel. The resurrection, the climax to which the Four Gospels pointed their readers,²⁴ released the power within the gospel for daily Christian living.

Jesus Christ's resurrection certified the gospel. Therefore, taught Paul, those events in far-off Judea give everyone hope: "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile. For in the gospel

the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last."²⁵

A call to live the future here and now

John brought another dimension to the gospel, presenting Jesus Christ as he was remembered by "the disciple whom he loved,"²⁶ a man with the heart of a pastor, a church leader deeply concerned about people, their cares and fears. "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."²⁷

John's presentation of the gospel revolves around the thrilling phrase, "that by believing you may have life." "John's central theme is eternal life as a present possession."

John brilliantly enshrines another aspect of the gospel of Jesus Christ in some of his most personal, intimate and up-close moments. John's Gospel is a vivid account of the personal ministering presence of the Messiah.

In John's Gospel, we meet a Christ who was a powerful public preacher.²⁸ We see Jesus as warm and hospitable. From his welcoming invitation, "Come...and you will see,"²⁹ to the challenge to doubting Thomas to put his finger in the nail marks in his hands,³⁰ here is an unforgettable portrait of the One who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us."³¹

People felt so welcome and comfortable with Jesus that they engaged him in lively give-and-take.³² They reclined next to him at a meal while eating out of the same dish with him.³³ They loved him so dearly as to impulsively swim to shore at the very sight of him to enjoy a breakfast he had prepared.³⁴

The Gospel according to John reminds us of how much the good news revolves around Jesus, the example he set and the eternal life available to us through him.³⁵

It reminds us that preaching the gospel isn't enough—we have to live it as well. John offers encouragement: Others may be attracted by our example to share the good news. That is what happened to the Samaritan woman Jesus met at the well³⁶ and to Mary of Magdala.³⁷

The One who wept at Lazarus' grave, the humble servant who washed his disciples' feet, is alive today. He offers us his own presence through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit: "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."³⁸

Jesus actively leads his people today through the Holy Spirit. His invitation is as personal and as encouraging as ever: "Come...and you will see."³⁹ □

- 1 1 Corinthians 2:2
- 2 Colossians 1:27
- 3 Mark 1:14-15
- 4 1 Corinthians 9:12
- 5 Romans 15:16
- 6 Ephesians 6:15
- 7 Colossians 2:10
- 8 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
- 9 Colossians 1:12-14
- 10 Ephesians 3:20-21
- 11 1 Corinthians 2:2
- 12 Matthew 19:30
- 13 Luke 13:28
- 14 Luke 14:16-24
- 15 Luke 9:51-56
- 16 Luke 11:20
- 17 Luke 4:19; Isaiah 61:1-2
- 18 Luke 15:20
- 19 Luke 18:13
- 20 Luke 11:9
- 21 Matthew 25:31-32
- 22 Matthew 11:5
- 23 Colossians 1:21-23
- 24 John 20:31
- 25 Romans 1:16-17
- 26 John 19:26
- 27 John 20:30-31
- 28 John 7:37-46
- 29 John 1:39
- 30 John 20:27
- 31 John 1:14
- 32 John 6:5-8
- 33 John 13:23-26
- 34 John 21:7-14
- 35 John 10:10
- 36 John 4:27-30
- 37 John 20:10-18
- 38 John 14:23
- 39 John 1:39



Moving Forward

Moving forward. A phrase that is popular in the corporate circles and now gaining acceptance even in the churches. In fact, my local church adopted "Moving Forward" as its annual theme in the last two years.

But what does moving forward actually mean? What does it entail? Is moving forward always good? What if the church is moving forward to worldliness and licentiousness? If a church is in error, would moving backward then have the same meaning as moving forward?

Most Christians are familiar with the command to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ¹. The apostle Peter also called upon Christians to grow up in their salvation.² In his letter to the Corinth church, Paul mentioned that because the church had not grown much, he could only feed them spiritual milk and not spiritual meat yet.³

The importance of growth in the life of a Christian is one of the reasons why many churches feel the need to move forward. Moving forward is usually associated with increase, with growth, with better things as well as pleasing God. Some churches may also look at moving forward as fulfilling the Great Commission.⁴ As we can see, it is good for a church to move forward. The only problem is how do we define what is meant by moving forward.

In some churches one finds that there is a lot of activities and energy. Many of the church members are heavily involved in the church ministries and programmes. There are meetings to attend and reports to be submitted. Such busyness is not wrong in itself. But being involved in many ministries is by itself not necessarily a sign of moving forward. Remember, a rocking chair can also give one a sense of motion, but the chair is not going anywhere.

Statistics are sometimes also used to show that a church has been moving forward. Increase in income, greater numbers attending church services, more literature printed and distributed, higher figures achieved in different ministries etc. have all been used to justify how the church has moved forward over the years. Again, statistics may be a good indicator of growth but only when all factors are considered. Recent events have shown us that some churches experienced spectacular growth in their numbers only to collapse just as quickly when the statistics took a hit.

By
Wong Teck
Kong

Moving forward is a process (a very long one), not a onetime thing. It involves the life span of its believers. It cannot be achieved overnight and there are no shortcuts. As long as a church is in existence, it must move forward.

The apostle Paul asked Christians to follow him as he followed Christ.⁵ This was because the books of the New Testament were not yet available, and Paul was one of the few who had seen Christ. But his objective to his followers was not so much to follow him but to follow Christ. He also appealed to Christians to be transformed to the mind of Christ⁶ by its renewal everyday just like a living sacrifice.⁷ Finally, he revealed that we should reflect Christ glory and likeness.⁸

But all these will only happen when Christians allow the Holy Spirit to come into their lives and transform them. Only when we surrender our lives totally to God will this come true. Only when the faith of Christ enables us to exchange our yoke with Christ. Only when we realise that we can change nothing on our own but to rely on the promises and goodness of God.

When the minds of believers are transformed, they will want to do the things that please their Saviour. They will want to share the good news with others because they have experienced it themselves. They will be willing to learn more of the nature and relationship with God. Past practices and traditions that have hindered the new understanding would be corrected.

When individuals' walk with Christ becomes closer and closer, then the church will move forward. After all, the church is but an aggregation of its believers. In moving forward, the church becomes more error free (like the wrinkles of the wedding dress of the Bride of Christ). She reflects her Head and future husband more and more to the community and non-believers that will bring glory to God.

The moving forward of a church is not an even path. There may be times of fast growth followed by little movements. Sometimes the church may even appear to be moving retrogressively. Whatever the case may be, ministries and numbers do not determine the growth of a church. Only Christ and the spiritual condition of the church can cause the church to move forward.

Ultimately it is God who caused the growth⁹. However, the closer the Body of Christ sticks to her Head, the faster the church will move forward.□



1 2 Peter 3:18
2 2 Peter 2:2
3 1 Corinthians 3:1-3
4 Matthew 28:19, 20
5 1 Corinthians 11:1
6 Romans 12:2
7 Romans 12:1
8 1 Corinthians 3:18
9 1 Corinthians 3:6

Can the dead live again?

When I was twenty-one years of age, I experienced my first encounter with death in my family. I had just begun my career as a teacher in a remote part of the state of Pahang and in Mid-August of 1980 I had returned home for a week of school holidays. While at home my father suddenly became ill and was vomiting constantly the whole morning. Being a stubborn man he refused to see a doctor, claiming he would recover soon. However, sensing something amiss I insisted on taking him to the hospital and he relented. Once there the doctors diagnosed that he had suffered a mild heart attack and that he would be given the necessary treatment. They assured me that there was no cause for worry as everything was under control. The next morning I visited him at his bed and he seemed recovered and looking forward to returning home. I left him telling him that the family would return in the afternoon to visit him. About two hours later a police car approaches our home and a policeman bluntly tells us that my father died. No explanation was given. I rushed to the hospital and saw my father's body covered in a white bed sheet. He had suffered a massive heart attack and all attempts to save him failed. No one from the family was with him at his moment of death.

I stood there stunned not knowing what to do. My mother was a housewife and my siblings were all still school going children. Eventually my relatives arrived and my uncle took care of all the funeral proceedings while I stood blankly unable to come to terms with what had happened. Death strikes us all. At the appointed time every human being will end their stay here on earth. Death takes the young and the old. Whether in old age, sickness or accident, death is victorious. Death brings grief, traumatizes families, it leaves children orphans, ends marriages and impacts the lives of all who are dear to the deceased. At funerals we see loved ones in grief knowing they will never see the deceased again.

The Prophet Job in the Bible asked a question, "Can the dead live again?" That is a question on every one's mind. Religion gives various answers. The dead will go to heaven or hell some say. The dead will be reincarnated others say. The dead will become one with the universe or the dead will cease to exist forever yet others say. Well, no one has come back from the dead to give us a definite answer. The Prophet Job continues, "If so, this would give me hope through all my years of struggle, and I would eagerly await the release of death."¹ He says if we could rise again from the dead then hope shines through, despite all the years of struggle and suffering. If the dead can indeed rise again who would raise us up and why? Well, there is one and only one person who can with divine authority raise the

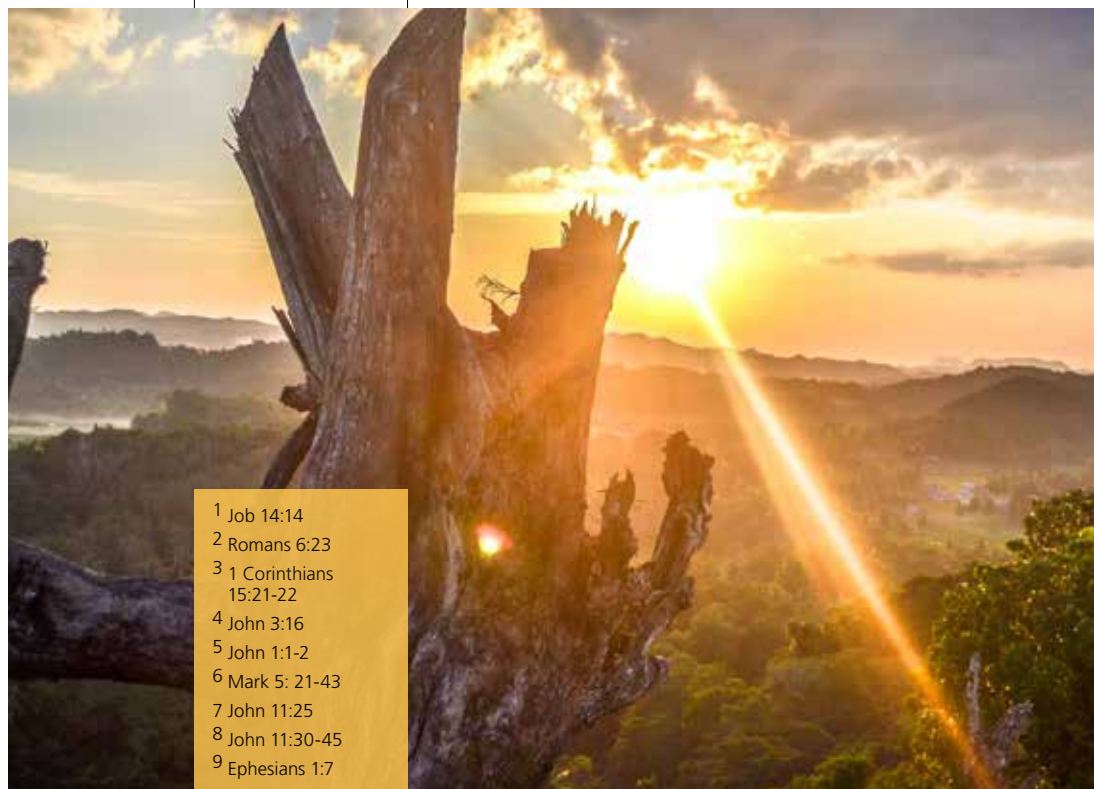


By
Devaraj Ramoo

dead again. It is he who Himself went through death and rose again bodily, none other than Jesus Christ the Son of God. Death has come to all mankind as a result of sin. The first humans, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and by their actions invited death into all humanity.² However the Bible tells us that death is not the end. It is not permanent. What is permanent is eternal life!

Eternal life is the gift of God and it comes through Jesus Christ. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.³ Can we believe that? All shall be made alive! Death is indeed a dark place. A place we all will end up in. You may prolong your life with good food, medication, exercise or supplements but there is no escape from the darkness that waits. Yet as dark and gloomy is the fate that awaits all of us that darkness must and will go. Why? Because the new man Christ removes the darkness. And he removes the darkness for all. Our next question is, "Who is this Jesus who can defeat death?" Perhaps an additional question is, "Why would he want to do it for us?" The answer to our second question is the infinite love of God. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.⁴ And who is this Jesus Christ who has defeated death? He is the Word who has always existed with God and who Himself is also God.⁵

When Jesus walked the earth as a human being, He constantly spoke of His life-giving presence for humanity. He came so that with one extraordinary event Christ would pay the penalty incurred by humanity through sin by taking upon Himself that penalty and paying the price by dying on the cross. But that is not all. The divine Christ rose from the dead! He appeared to his disciples and hundreds of others not as a spirit



- 1 Job 14:14
- 2 Romans 6:23
- 3 1 Corinthians 15:21-22
- 4 John 3:16
- 5 John 1:1-2
- 6 Mark 5: 21-43
- 7 John 11:25
- 8 John 11:30-45
- 9 Ephesians 1:7

Already saved, being

The Bible uses three phrases—*already saved*, *being saved*, *will be saved*—when speaking about our salvation. Already saved is in the past tense, being saved is in the present tense, and will be saved is in the future tense. Are believers already saved, being saved, or will be saved? How do we reconcile these seemingly contradictory phrases?

This article will help you understand these phrases correctly, strengthen your faith, and assure your salvation in Christ.

Already saved

Some verses in the Bible tell us that we are *already saved*. For example:

“...I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also *you are saved*, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.”¹

“For by grace *you have been saved* through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.”²

“...according to His mercy He *saved* us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”³

These verses tell us that we are already saved, meaning, we are already forgiven, reconciled, justified and given the gift of eternal life. Because we are already saved, we need not worry about our salvation as it is assured. This is very liberating as we can now and live out our new (saved) life in Christ with joy and thanksgiving.

Being saved

Some verses in the Bible also tell us that we are *being saved* now. For example:

“...praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were *being saved*.”⁴

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are *being saved* it is the power of God.”⁵

“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are *being saved* and among those who are perishing.”⁶

These verses tell us that we are in the *process of being saved* as we continue to overcome our weaknesses and grow spiritually. The implication here is: we are still imperfect, and therefore we must grow spiritually to attain a certain measure or level of righteousness before we can be saved. There is an element of uncertainty because we could still lose out on our salvation if we fail to attain the accepted level of righteousness during this lifetime.

Will be saved

Yet other verses in the Bible tell us that we *will be saved* in the future. For example:



By
Dr. P. Sellappan

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and *you will be saved*, you and your household.”⁷

“For whoever calls on the name of the LORD *shall be saved*.”⁸

“Nevertheless, she *will be saved* in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.”⁹

These verses tell us that we will be saved in the future at the second coming of Christ when he will raise us from death or change us instantaneously from mortality to immortality. As in the previous case, this implies we must overcome and grow spiritually before we can be saved. Again, there is an element of uncertainty because we could still lose our salvation if we fail to attain the acceptable level of righteousness.



Let’s summarize: The *already saved* case seems to be good news because it assures our salvation. It is not contingent or dependent on how much we have overcome or grown spiritually. This is called *salvation by grace*. The *being saved and will be saved* cases don’t seem to be all that good because our salvation *depends on our overcoming and growing*. This is called *salvation by works*.

So how do we reconcile these seemingly contradictory phrases? How do we interpret and understand these phrases?

How do we interpret?

The perceived contradiction is in our *interpretation*. For correct understanding, we must interpret these verses correctly. Otherwise we will come to wrong conclusions.

saved, will be saved

Some verses in the Bible state God's *objective* truth as *it really is because of Christ's worked-out salvation for all humanity*. Other verses state our *subjective personal feeling or experience*. The objective truth is based on Christ's finished work on the cross - his victory over sin and death. This doesn't depend on our feelings or experiences, which are very subjective. Our feelings and experiences change depending on our situation at any given moment.

When we read a passage, we must ask 'does this passage refer to the objective truth (as God sees) or our personal subjective experience?'

While the objective truth is constant and unchanging, we, because of some misfortune or bad experience see ourselves as not yet saved. Lack of spiritual fruits in our life seem to affirm or confirm our feelings. But



the truth is, our salvation is secure in Christ, and is not dependent on our 'yo-yo, up-and-down' feelings or experiences. Our salvation is based *solely* on what God has accomplished for us in Christ Jesus. This is called *salvation is by grace*. We need not worry about our salvation. Instead, we thank God for our salvation and live out our new life in Christ in a radically new way—in the power of the Holy Spirit. *Already saved* assures our salvation. But grace always leads us to obey God and say no to sin as a way of life.

Being saved and *will be saved* seem to imply that our salvation is conditional – dependent on our overcoming and growing spiritually. These phrases exhort us to grow and overcome so we might experience the abundant life Jesus promised us.

Salvation is by grace

Many believers view salvation as a *transaction* - like buying a product (or service) and paying for it. They say something like this: "God will forgive if we repent of our sin and believe in Jesus. Only then can we be saved." In effect, they are saying our salvation is conditional – dependent on our repentance and receiving Jesus as our personal Savior. But that is *salvation by works* as it *depends* on our repentance and belief in Jesus.

God offers salvation freely to all people before we accept, repent, believe or obey. Salvation is solely by grace through faith in Christ. It doesn't depend on our effort—not even in our repentance and belief. Jesus *assumed* our sinful nature, overcame it, and made it *perfect and holy*. He did this long before we knew and believed in him. Salvation is *solely* by grace. We receive freely with joy and thanksgiving.

What about unbelievers?

What about unbelievers—those who do not know, believe or accept Jesus, including those who have died without hearing or knowing Jesus? Where do they stand?

God sent Jesus to save the entire human race from sin and death and give them eternal life. Jesus' incarnation—his birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension—is for *all* people in *all* generations. He lived *vicariously* for us, in our place. He represents us.

Scripture tells us: all have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God; therefore, all deserve to die. But God is rich in grace and mercy. He desires all people to be saved. He didn't create humans just to allow them to sin and then zap them! If he did that, he wouldn't be a God of love. God created us in love and for love. He created us, so we might have fellowship and loving relationship with him as his dear children.

Let's look at some verses to convince ourselves God's universal offer of salvation.

Apostle Paul declared that Jesus has *reconciled all people, justified all people, and saved all people* – *objectively* speaking. And this reconciliation, justification and salvation occurred while we were yet still *powerless, still sinners* and *still God's enemies*.¹⁰ Paul spoke to believers, but he clearly implied that it is for all people—believers as well as unbelievers. Here are some verses that confirms this truth.

"When I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all men* to myself."¹¹

"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also *for the sins of the whole world*."¹²

"This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance...that we have put our hope in the living God, who is *the Savior of all men*..."¹³

"...the Lamb of God, who *takes away the sin of the world!*"¹⁴

"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the *Savior of the world*."¹⁵

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was *reconciling the world to himself in Christ*, not counting men's sins against them."¹⁶

God is love, and his love is unconditional. His love includes all people in *all* nations and in all generations. He loves us as much as he loves his son Jesus. He will never stop loving us even if we deny or reject his love for us. His love is the same for all people. He doesn't love some people more (like believers) and others (like unbelievers) like we do.

Jesus' *incarnation* includes all people. *Jesus repented for us and was baptized for us – vicariously*. He was tempted in the wilderness for us. He overcame and defeated sin for us. He assumed our *sinful nature* and perfected it for us throughout his life. He died and rose and ascended for us. He is now seated at the right hand of God for us. *Jesus represents us vicariously (in our place)*. That's why we say: when Jesus died, we died; when he rose, we rose. He is seated at the right hand of God; and we too are seated with him at the right hand of God. Jesus stands before God *holy and righteous in our place* and on our behalf. How else can we become holy and righteous?

Jesus didn't retire to heaven after he had completed his earthly ministry. He continues to minister to us from heaven as our *High Priest, Mediator and Intercessor*. He continues to bear our burden and intercede for us. He takes our imperfect prayers, transforms, and makes them as his prayers and offers to God as sweet-smelling aroma pleasing to God. He is *always* there for us and that should comfort us, especially in our weaknesses, trials and sufferings. He is our *eternal* High Priest. That is why we receive salvation by grace through faith in Christ.

- 1 1 Corinthians 15:1-2
- 2 Ephesians 2:8
- 3 Titus 3:4-7
- 4 Act 2:47
- 5 1 Corinthians 1:18
- 6 2 Corinthians 2:15
- 7 Acts 16:31
- 8 Romans 10:13
- 9 1 Timothy 2:15
- 10 Romans 5:1-10
- 11 John 12:32
- 12 1 John 2:2
- 13 1 Timothy 4:9-10
- 14 John 1:29
- 15 1 John 4:14
- 16 2 Corinthians 5:18-19
- 17 Matthew 22:2-14, Luke 14:16-24
- 18 Romans 8:31-39

God has forgiven, reconciled and justified *all* people. Jesus worked out salvation for all people. But not all know, believe, accept Jesus as their personal Savior. Not all experience the abundant life he offers. But in due time they will - *when Jesus is revealed to them*. Then they too will be set free to experience their new life in Christ.

One may ask: if salvation is freely available to all people (including unbelievers), why do we need to repent and obey? The answer is: if we don't repent and obey, we will not experience God's love for us (as they say, the proof is in the pudding). We will be filled with fear, shame, guilt, alienation and rejection. In this alienated state, we *cannot* experience God's love, joy, peace, assurance, security, communion and eternal life through the Holy Spirit. But when we turn to God, we will experience radical changes in our life. The Holy Spirit will renew our mind and empower us to participate in Jesus' glorified humanity and experience God's abundant life.

Let's summarize. The objective truth is: all people—from Adam and Eve to the last person to be born—are included in God's plan of salvation. The Parable of the Great Banquet and the Parable of the Wedding Supper illustrate this truth beautifully.¹⁷ Through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit, God has eternally bound all humanity to himself. He will never stop loving us. Nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God.¹⁸ That is how much God loves us.

All three phrases—*already saved, being saved, will be saved*—are correct. We must interpret and understand them correctly. We must ask whether they refer to God's *objective truth* or to our *subjective personal experience*. God offers salvation freely to all people; it doesn't depend on our personal experience. It depends solely on what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. May this understanding anchor your faith securely in Christ Jesus. □

Continued from page 11

ghost but as a living human being. The entire event is recorded in the gospels through eye witness accounts. If Christ rose from the dead, is there any evidence that He could raise others from the dead?

In the gospels are amazing accounts of Him raising the dead. In one account a ruler of the synagogue named Jairus came to Jesus to ask for healing for his sick twelve year old daughter. By the time Jesus reached the house, the girl was already dead and a large crowd had begun mourning. Taking the parents of the child and His disciples inside, Jesus calmly took the child by hand and raised her to life again.⁶ In another astonishing event, Jesus received news that a man named Lazarus whom He was close to was ill and would die. By the time Jesus arrived, Lazarus was already dead for four days and was laid in a tomb. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that Lazarus was dead.

Here is where Jesus made one of the most profound statements in the Bible. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live."⁷ He then proceeded to the tomb of Lazarus and in the presence of all there He commanded

the dead man to come out of the grave and behold Lazarus came out alive again!⁸ There was no chance of faking this event as it was witnessed by so many people. Despite what beliefs you may hold in your life, there is truth that negates what is false. It is this truth that brings hope to all humanity despite whatever culture, race, religion or philosophy we profess.

God has not left us lost and groping in the dark. He has provided the answers to humanity's most perplexing questions. The Light of the world has come and through His death and resurrection has given us the way out of the consequences of our sins to have a life that lasts for eternity in His presence. One day in the future all our loved ones will rise again, alive to be reunited and to experience an eternity of life with almighty God. His kindness and grace has purchased our freedom from death through the blood of His Son.⁹

It is now thirty-nine years since my father's death. Since that time I've seen many relatives and friends pass away. When I stand at their funerals, my heart is comforted knowing they will all rise again because my saviour Jesus Christ will make it so. □

Taking Care of Business

In our town there is a Taekwondo martial arts studio owned and operated a seventh-degree black belt and master-level instructor. I'm familiar with this man because our son Will studied Taekwondo there. Will and I made the 30-minute drive twice a week for 12 years, from the time Will was 5 until he was 17. In the early years, I went in and observed the class. In his later teen years, I would often run errands during the class.

It's been almost 10 years since Will stopped taking lessons. Someone recently mentioned this man and his studio and said that he had moved his location. Curious, I went online to his website to see where he had moved. He now has two studios and six qualified instructors (four men and two women), and guess who his instructors are—six of his eight children! He proudly displayed photos of his instructors on his website and I was pleased to recognize the children's faces on these young adults.

I remember these children coming to the studio with their dad, the youngest ones playing and tumbling on the mats or watching and absorbing from the sidelines and the older children attending class with Will. It was obvious they enjoyed being with their dad, but as they grew, they took learning their patterns and moves, sparring, and board breaking seriously. I didn't realize it at the time that they weren't just learning the art of Taekwondo, they were learning their father's business. Their father, no doubt, hoped and expected at least some of his children to follow in his footsteps. His children probably had that expectation as well and they prepared for the business—there were classes to take, tests to pass, certifications to earn, and many, many hours of practice.

You probably know where I'm going with this.

I was recently reading Jesus' first recorded conversation (Luke 2:41-52). I'm sure you're familiar with it. His parents had attended the Passover festival and holy days in Jerusalem and were returning home. All who were able to attend the festival did so, even if it meant traveling 65 miles (100 km) on foot, as it did for those from Nazareth. His parents were traveling in a large caravan of family and friends. It was only after they had been on the road for a whole day did they realize that their son Jesus wasn't with them. There were so many in the traveling party that it took another day of searching to determine that he wasn't among their friends and family either. Distaught, they quickly returned to

By
Sondra Peters

Jerusalem and looked for him there. When they tracked him down back at the temple with the teachers, Jesus responded incredulously, "Why were you searching for me? Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" In other words, "Didn't you know I had to be doing my Father's business?"

What exactly was Jesus doing at the temple? He was sitting at the feet of the teachers of the law! They were probably discussing the Law of Moses, for this was their specialty. Their teaching style was not to lecture, but to ask questions to make the students think. But Jesus was asking questions as well. I can't help but wonder if Jesus, even as a child, asked questions to make his *teachers* think. Maybe he asked them about the spirit of the law (which he spoke of years later in Matthew 5). Perhaps he said something like this, "Teacher, I've heard it said that I should love my neighbor and hate my enemy. But what if my neighbor is my enemy?" By being in the temple having discussions with the teachers, Jesus was preparing for his divine mission, the business for which he was born, to save the world.

Years later Jesus explained to his disciples (Luke 19) that they too must be about their Father's business. He gave this instruction in the form of a parable . . .

It seems that there was a future king preparing to go on a trip to another country. He left his people with a job to do: invest or trade his money while he was gone and make it grow. He returned as a king and discovered that one of his men increased the money he'd been allotted ten fold, another five fold and one did absolutely nothing with the money. To the one who did nothing with what he was given, the king did *not* say, "So you decided to play it safe. Well, at least you didn't lose it."¹ No, the king was majorly ticked off! He



Continues on page 19

Can Our Religion Become An Idol?

The question posed in the title above may seem strange but it made sense to me when I read the following story. Kasvari narrates an incident that left a lasting impression on him. He remembers witnessing his domestic helper at home, a man much older than him, dusting his writing table when he accidentally toppled an object to the ground. Since he considered this to be a “holy” object, he was enraged. He then proceeded to slap the helper right across his face!

Shocked and humiliated, the helper began to cry. Being a poor man, he did not dare to retaliate. Instead, he just allowed himself to be hurt and shamed. Many years later Kasvari recalled this incident and suddenly realized what a dastardly act he had committed to slap a man much older than him. In his article he made the following observation:

The fact that I had got so worked up over an object I considered ‘holy’ being allegedly profaned that I was willing to violate a fellow human being’s very dignity with such impunity should forever remain a compelling reminder to me of how easy it is to make an idol of our religious beliefs and practices, so much so that we are sometimes willing to completely dehumanize others, and ourselves too, for their sake.

Pure Religion

When religious beliefs and practices are so exaggerated and taken to an extreme so that it begins to violate human dignity, then it has lost, not only its purity, but also its purpose. What a tragedy it is when religious beliefs make one to treat a fellow human being badly. Yet, sadly, we see so many people being given second-class treatment or being discriminated against or their fundamental rights being stripped away – many a times this treatment being inspired by various interpretations of religious dogma. Worse still is when such beliefs motivate one to hurt, exploit, maim, kill and murder thinking it is being true to such beliefs.

Interestingly, the apostle James reminds us, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” (James 1:27). Orphans and widows, particularly at the time when James wrote this, were looked down upon and shunned such that they had no means of economic support. They had to depend on begging or selling themselves as slaves to prevent starvation. That is why the Bible states that our religion is pure and blameless only when we are willing to treat such people with care and dignity.

By
Dan Zachariah

Biblical Worldview of Human Beings

Why should we treat people with respect and dignity? It is because of how the Bible views them! Let’s examine a few scriptures to educate ourselves on the Biblical worldview of human beings.

The creation account of the first humans reveals something fascinating: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth’” (Genesis 1:26).

The fact that humans are created in God’s own image brings out the special nature and uniqueness of this created order. Humans are the only part of God’s creation that are a combination of physical and spiritual realities reflecting His image. They are to have dominion and authority over all of creation – rather than being subjugating and exploitative of one another.

The Psalms bring out another special aspect of humans. Notice how the prophet David puts it: “When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers – the moon and the stars you set in place, what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them? Yet, you made them only a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honour” (Psalms 8:3-5).

The word “God” in Hebrew is “Elohim” – the Bible declares that humans are indeed the highest order of creation! Consequently, humans are highly valuable and of immense worth – indeed crowned with “glory and honour.” That does not mean to say that humans are gods or equal to God, but neither are they to be reduced to being worthless or debased to the level of animals.

God’s Masterpiece

Human beings are indeed special and of exceptional worth and have a marvellous destiny. They are of exceptional worth, not only because of what was discussed above, but also because of the Incarnation – Jesus Himself took on humanity in all its aspects. This indicates the intrinsic dignity of humanity. Jesus did not take the flesh of animals but of humanity – showing that fleshly humans are not evil in itself (the Gnostic heresy).



Continues on page 18



A deeper look at Jesus' New Command

Most of us can recite John 13:35, “By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.” I’ve spent most of my life wondering why Jesus referred to this as a “new command.” After all, it was very similar to the great commandment discussion Jesus had earlier in Matthew.

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”¹

So why did Jesus, on his last night with his disciples before heading to the cross, say he was giving them a new command, and then say the new command was to love one another? Wasn’t this already a command?

The answer is in the preceding verse in John 13:34 – and this is what we need to unpack for our congregations as we focus on reaching out in mission.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

If Jesus says he is giving us something new, it seems imperative, we pay attention. This isn’t just anyone giving us a new command, this is Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, Emmanuel – God with us.

So, what is new?

It is in the phrase, “*as I have loved you, so must you love one another.*” Let’s look at how Jesus loves us and discuss how that relates to people around us.

Jesus came to us

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one

By
Rick
Shallenberger

and only Son...” The reason Jesus came was because of love. He didn’t come presenting himself as God to rule over us and make us conform. Rather, he came and presented himself as *one of us*—fully human—and lived among us. The fact that he took the initiative is the key to understanding how his command to love is “new.”

Jesus didn’t demand that we come to him; he came to us. He entered our world. He ate our food. He lived as we live. He walked the roads we walk. He dressed the way we dress. He spoke our language. He didn’t wait for us to come to a certain level of understanding, or change our behavior, or demand a certain lifestyle—he simply entered our world. As believers, we can’t just wait for people to come to us—we need to go to them. We want to be intentional about going to others—loving outside the doors of the church. We want to enter the neighborhood God has called us to. We want to walk the streets, eat the food, speak the language, spend time with others.

Jesus didn’t go all over the world; he came to a specific area or region to start his ministry. Jesus had a target community where he did his ministry and mission.

What is our target community? Is this where God has placed us?

Our target community is those we meet and interact regularly. It’s not the whole township, city, county, or state. We need to be specific in determining where Jesus is inviting us to love others as he loves them. We need to ask God to help us see people the way he sees them, and to love them the way he loves them.

Jesus built relationships

Jesus didn’t stay at home and wait for people to come to him. He went to them – into their neighborhoods,

into their communities. He went where people were gathering. He went to those who were hurting, and had needs, and he went to those who were ostracized by others.

When he encountered others, he didn't just say "follow me" and then go about his business hoping they would follow. He spent time with his disciples. He built relationships with them, and with many others. People followed him because he was relational. He was invited into people's homes because he showed them love and they reciprocated. He was enjoyable to be around. And note that some relationships were closer than others. Jesus was intentional in his mission.

The way we show love to our target community is to go out and spend time with them, talking with them. We need to get to know them, find out what their interests are, what their needs are. We need to be present at their events, so we can build relationship. We need to be interested in them – getting to know their views, their hopes, their fears - before sharing our hope and our faith. When they see us interested in them, they will show interest in us. Again, we need to ask God to help us see them through his eyes. We need to see them as his beloved – those he loves so much he sent his Son, and now he is sending us.

Jesus got involved

Jesus loved people by getting involved in their communities and in their lives. He spent time in public places – going where the people were celebrating, mourning, meeting, learning, shopping, debating.

One way to show love for people is to go where they go: school events, local sporting events, community picnics, celebrations and meetings. Go to funerals of family members of those you've met. Go to restaurants and coffee shops they go. Let people see you and become familiar with your presence. Let them know you care for them. Let them know they can call you when they go through trauma or need to share.

Jesus gave us this new command—to actively love others as he loves us—because he knew he was going to send us just as the Father sent him. He knew he was going to invite us to participate in his mission of sharing his love and his life with others.

The new command Jesus gave us—to love as he loves—is to reinforce that love verb.☐

Continued from page 16

¹ Matthew 22:36-40

The "fall" brought the corruption of humanity and subsequently sinfulness. But Jesus, in His humanity, reversed the effects of the fall and as the last Adam, is giving all people a new birth. Notice how the apostle Paul states our ultimate destiny as humans: "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago" (Ephesians 2:10). In God's view human beings are special, of great worth, significance, virtue and are destined to much "honour and glory" such that God Himself will make his abode with them (Revelation 21:3). Indeed, humanity is the magnum opus, the paragon, the peak of God's creation! That is why nothing should motivate us to strip humans of their dignity and wellbeing – not even religion!

The New Commandment

Jesus in his final discourse with his disciples left them with this new commandment: "A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, you must love one another" (John 13:34). This command to love, not only has a standard, but also has a reason behind it – the reason being, God loves us. God loves us

because God has made us worthy of that love. If God loves (sinful) humanity, then who are we to dishonour, disrespect and treat others with hatred?

Treating others disrespectfully with a sense of disdain, as though they are just not worth loving is a direct violation of true religion. In fact, the Bible is clear that the evidence of true religion (a genuine relationship with God) is in the way we treat our fellow human beings (1 John 4:20-21). Any religious dogma that strips humans of their dignity and value that God has invested in them is false, toxic and idolatrous. Kasvari sums up: The memory of that awful incident forces me to remain aware that if in our devotion to beliefs, ideas, prejudices, practices, dogmas and objects that we have fashioned ourselves (and that we install in that place, in our hearts, that God alone should occupy) we demean, degrade, and despise our fellow human beings with no compunction whatsoever, we can be sure that religion has become for us a mere idol and that we have strayed far, far away from God.☐

The Power of Giving and Receiving

Christians will continually misinterpret and misuse Jesus if we don't understand the circle dance of mutuality and communion that he participated in from all eternity (which we call "Christ"). Instead, we made Jesus into a monarchical "Christ the King," a title he rejected in his lifetime,¹ and we operate as if God's interest in creation or humanity only began 2,000 years ago. Both Western and Eastern Christianity made the one who described himself as "meek and humble of heart"² into an imperial God. The Greek Zeus became the Latin *Deus*.

What if we actually surrendered to the inner Trinitarian flow and let it be our primary teacher? Our notion of society, politics, and authority—which is still top down and outside in—would utterly change. But circles are much more threatening than pyramids are, at least to empires, the wealthy, and the patriarchal system. Yet "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit"³ was supposed to be our circular and all-inclusive ecology. This relational reality existed from the very beginning as revealed in the very first lines of the Bible. There we already have God (Creator), Christ (God made manifest as "light"), and Holy Spirit "hovering over the chaos"⁴ to awaken it—which is still happening.

Trinitarian theology says that spiritual power is more circular or spiral, not so much hierarchical. It's here; it's within us. It's shared and shareable; it's already entirely for us and grounded within us. What hope this gives! "And hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."⁵ God's Spirit

Continued from page 15

By
Fr Richard Rohr

- ¹ John 18:37
- ² Matthew 11:29
- ³ 2 Corinthians 13:13
- ⁴ Genesis 1:1-3
- ⁵ Romans 5:5
- ⁶ Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12
- ⁷ Isaiah 42:6; 49:6
- ⁸ Luke 24:49

is planted within us and operating as us! Don't keep looking to the top of the pyramid. Stop idolizing the so-called "1 percent." There's nothing worthwhile up there that is not also down here. Worst of all, it has given 99 percent of the world an unnecessary and tragic inferiority complex.

Trinity shows that God's power is not any kind of domination, threat, or coercion. If the Father does not dominate the Son, and the Son does not dominate the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit does not dominate the Father or the Son, then there's *no domination in God*. All divine power is shared power and the letting go of autonomous power. This God is not seeking control, as we do, but handing on the power to the Other.

There's no seeking of power over in the Trinity, but only *power with*—a giving away, a sharing, a letting go, and thus an infinity of trust and mutuality. This should have changed all Christian relationships: in marriage, in culture, in church, and across borders. The prophet Isaiah tried to teach such servanthood to Israel in the classic four "servant songs."⁶ He was trying to train them in being "light to all nations,"⁷ but Hebrew history predicted what Christianity then repeated: human nature prefers kings, domination, wars, and empires instead of suffering servanthood or levelling love.

We all already have all the power (*dynamis*) we need both within us and between us—in fact, Jesus assures us that we are already "*clothed*" in it "from on high!"⁸ The Holy Spirit redefines power from the inside out and from the bottom up—just the opposite of most human cultures. This is why the Gospel is so seldom understood or lived. □

expected this man to at least do something with the money instead of just keeping it safe! This lesson was so important that Jesus repeated it in a slightly different version in Matthew 25.

In Luke 19 it is understood that the future king is Jesus Christ. The trip this future king makes represents the interim between Christ' death/resurrection/ascension and his second coming. We are like the king's people to whom he has given money to increase, except it's not money He's given us. He's given us gifts of the holy spirit and spiritual understanding and he expects us to expand these gifts. Please note that these are gifts. They've not been earned. These gifts grow when you immerse yourself in the things of God—praying, studying, worshipping, sharing the gospel. Your spiritual growth is not from fear of what God will do to you if you don't do as He says. Your spiritual growth is a result of love, appreciation and gratitude for what He has done for you—much like how you would respond

¹ Halford, John. <https://www.gci.org/articles/going-for-the-gold/>

to someone who has donated an organ, like a kidney, to save your life!

Jesus, at the age of 12, no longer a little child, felt a pressing need to be preparing for the job he'd been born to do. It was his expectation and his *Father's* expectation.

This story is our story.

Ask yourself, am I still tumbling on the mat and observing from the sidelines while others are doing the Father's business? Or do I have a pressing urgent need to be about my Father's business? Am I following in Jesus' footsteps in the work he was and is doing for the Father? Am I making the most of the opportunities God presents to me? Am I learning and growing spiritually through prayer, study, dwelling on the things of God, and sharing the gospel? *This* is taking care of the Father's business. □

The word of God

The phrase “word of God” often appears in Scripture, with two important but distinct meanings.

1. The written word of God

The Bible is called *The Word of God* because God inspired its message. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”¹

Scripture tells us how to live an abundant life here and now, with advice on relationships, marriage, conduct on the job, health—indeed, *all* facets of human activity. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”²

More importantly, the Bible reveals the way to *everlasting* life. That way does not come naturally to



By
Paul Hailey

Personally, I resisted seeking God for years--Christianity seemed unnecessary, strange, and I thought it was an emotional crutch for weak people. But when I faced a serious difficulty I began thinking differently. I can relate to the psalmist who wrote, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.”⁶

My life became more pleasant and satisfying when I began applying God’s guidelines, as inept as I was, and still am. God continues to bless me in ways I never anticipated. I know of others who had been drawn to seek God when they experienced health, financial, relationship, or addiction issues.

Scripture opens our eyes, sometimes uncomfortably, to see sin dwelling in us, prompting us to change. “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged word. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”⁷ Correction is uncomfortable, but heeding it brings more joy and fulfillment into our lives.

Jesus, in responding to Satan who was tempting him to sin, responded, “It is written, “Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”⁸ His words never become obsolete, as some liberal thinkers claim. Jesus, commenting on his own words, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.”⁹

2. The living Word of God

The phrase *Word of God* also refers to the Person of Jesus. Jesus is the living Word of God, now in heaven at the Father’s side. John, seeing a vision of Jesus in heaven, writes, “...his name is the Word of God.”¹⁰

John also tells us, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”¹¹

Jesus was the Spokesman at creation. “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood fast.”¹²

John continued, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”¹³

When Jesus addressed some skeptics he said, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to



us. We may live for decades thinking we are on the right path. But Scripture warns, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”³ Our natural minds pull us astray from God. “Because the carnal (natural) mind is enmity against God” for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”⁴Jeremiah agreed when he wrote, “I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps.”⁵

We need to learn and accept God’s one and only path to everlasting life—trusting in Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Until we do that, we fall short, even if we are living a life that seems “good” to us.

Someone once commented, “The biggest lesson in life is to learn that our Father knows best.” Indeed, it is a big hard-to-swallow lesson that we are not self-sufficient and need to invite God into our lives.

- 1 2 Timothy 3:16, 17
- 2 John 10:10
- 3 Proverbs 16:25
- 4 Romans 8:7
- 5 Jeremiah 10:23
- 6 Psalm 119:67
- 7 Hebrews 4:12
- 8 Matthew 4:4
- 9 Matthew 24:25
- 10 Revelation 19:13
- 11 John 1:1-3
- 12 Psalm 33:8, 9
- 13 John 1:14
- 14 John 5:39, 40
- 15 John 14:6
- 16 Luke 11:28

Praise & Thanksgiving

“Let the music heal your soul”, says the title of a Christian song.

Music draws people. It connects. It heals... it is an effective expression of love, adoration, happiness, a time of celebration. How about in sadness, grief and loss? Are we able to sing, praise and worship God? Can we do that?

David got up and worshipped God even after the death of his infant son (2 Samuel 12:16-20). He still praised and thanked God: “But I trust in Your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in Your salvation. I will sing the Lord’s praise, for He has been good to me.” (Psalm 13:5-6)

We sing not only when we are happy, but we sing even when we are down and out, at the lowest point of our life... or when our heart is heavy-laden and grieved. That’s where our “shalom” begins!

The greatest worship is being able to praise despite being in our most dire situation. David praises, sings and dances for God without any inhibitions: “...David danced before the Lord with all his might...” (2 Samuel 6:14)

R T Kendall writes, “When you can affirm God in your darkest hour - and when nothing makes sense - you bring Him great glory and honour and praise.”

There are many forms of praise. In singing as well as in prayer; giving a word of thanks. When we wonder what or how to pray, the easiest thing to do is to start with thanksgiving. We will discover once we start to give thanks, the things we are thankful for go on and on.

A W Tozer tells us: “Eternity won’t be long enough to learn all that God is or praise Him for all that He has done.”

Continued from page 20

By
Anna Teo

Our prayers should not be just a shopping list - asking God for help or for things but praising and worshiping Him with thanksgiving, too. As we do that, we will soon realise that we change. Our perspectives and even how we look at the issues change, too. It may dawn on us suddenly, hey, wait a minute, the issue and big hurdle I’m facing right now is ‘no big deal’. Yes, definitely not that big a deal, if we decide to hand it over to Jesus! For nothing is too big for Him. He excels in handling extraordinary and impossible things.

Another form of praise and thanksgiving is to start a gratitude journal. There’s a familiar hymn, ‘Count your blessings’ with lyrics that goes something like this

“Count your blessings name them one by one.

Count your blessings, see what God has done...”

But guess what, we often forget the blessings we’ve been given, so how can we count or even name them one by one?

We can start writing down and keeping a record of everything we are thankful for daily. Lest we forget... when things don’t go too well in our life, this journal will serve as a timely reminder on how God saw us through it all... and He will continue to do so. King David did this often, that’s what the Psalms are all about.

Mark Batterson tells us how to increase our faith and joy:

“By remembering and counting miracles, we fortify faith.

By remembering and counting blessings, we amplify joy.”

Apostle Paul exhorts Christians “in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18).☐



have life.”¹⁴

Jesus is the living Gospel, the good news for everyone, the One who embodies all that Scripture says and who offers salvation to all. Jesus told the Apostle Thomas, “...I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.”¹⁵

Let’s live by the word and through the Word

When Jesus was speaking to a crowd, a woman responded, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.” Jesus replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”¹⁶

It is through the word of God that we come to know our Lord and Savior, the Word of God. Let’s heed the

written words of God and obey them! In doing so, we will be obeying our Lord and Savior, the living Word of God.

Heavenly Father, show us through your word, the Bible, the way to live our physical and spiritual lives. Show us all who Jesus is, and enable us to accept and obey him as our Lord and Savior. In his name we ask, Amen.☐

Is Jesus the only way of salvation?

People sometimes object to the Christian belief that salvation is given only through Jesus Christ. In our pluralistic society, tolerance is expected, even demanded, and the concept of freedom of religion (which permits all religions) is sometimes misinterpreted to mean that all religions are somehow equally true.

All paths lead to the same God, some say, as if they have travelled all of them and have returned from the destination. They are not tolerant of the “narrow-minded” people who believe in only one way, and they object to evangelism, for example, as an insulting attempt to change the beliefs of other people. Yet they themselves want to change the beliefs of those who believe in only one way.

Other religions

Most religions are exclusive. They each believe that they have the correct teachings, correct path, and correct revelation. Even the pluralists believe that pluralism is more right than other ideas.

All paths do *not* lead to the same God. Each religion has its own ideas of God - some believe in polytheism; some in monotheism; some in others. Some say salvation brings heavenly rewards; some say salvation leads to nothingness. They wouldn't agree that their paths eventually lead to the same destination. They would fight rather than switch.

We believe that the Christian gospel is correct, while at the same time allowing people to reject it. Faith requires that people have liberty not to believe. Although we affirm the right for people to believe as they decide, this does not mean that we think that all faiths are true. Allowing other people to believe as they wish does not mean that we have to quit believing what we do.

Biblical claims

Jesus' earliest disciples tell us that he claimed to be the one and only path to God. He said, If you don't follow me, you will not be in the kingdom of God.¹ If you reject me, you will not be with me in eternity.² People



By
Dr. Joseph
Tkach

who reject Jesus probably would not want to be with him in eternity, anyway.

Jesus said that God “has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father, who sent him.”³ Jesus claimed to be the exclusive means of truth and salvation. People who reject him are also rejecting God, because God is just like Jesus.

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world, ⁴ I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.”⁵ People who claim that there

are other ways to salvation are wrong, Jesus said.

Peter was equally blunt when he told the Jewish leaders, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven...by which we must be saved.”⁶

Paul also said that people who did not know Christ were “dead in your transgressions and sins.”⁷ They had no hope, and despite their religious beliefs, they did not have God. There is only one Mediator, he said—only one way to get to God.⁸

Jesus was the ransom that everyone needed.⁹ If there were any other set of instructions, or any other path that offered salvation, then God would have provided it.¹⁰

It is through Christ that the world is reconciled to God.¹¹ Paul was called to spread the gospel among the Gentiles. Their religion, he said, was worthless.¹² The book of Hebrews says: Christ is not just better than other paths—he is effective whereas they are not.¹³ It is an all-or-nothing difference, not a difference of one being a little better than the others.

The Christian teaching of exclusive salvation is based on what Jesus said, and what the Scriptures teach. This is tightly linked to who Jesus is, and our need for grace.

Our need for grace

The Bible says that Jesus is the Son of God in a unique way. As God in the flesh, he gave his life for



¹ Matthew 7:26-27

² Matthew 10:32-33

³ John 5:22-23

⁴ John 8:12

⁵ John 14:6-7

⁶ Acts 4:12

⁷ Ephesians 2:1

⁸ 1 Timothy 2:5

⁹ 1 Timothy 4:10

¹⁰ Galatians 3:21

¹¹ Colossians 1:20-22

¹² Acts 14:15

¹³ Hebrews 10:11

¹⁴ Matthew 26:39

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:14;

John 2:2

¹⁶ 2 Peter 3:9

¹⁷ John 3:16-17

¹⁸ Galatians 3:21

By Fr Richard Rohr

I would name salvation as simply the readiness, the capacity, and the willingness to stay in relationship. As long as you show up with some degree of vulnerability, the Spirit can keep working. Self-sufficiency makes God experience impossible! That's why Jesus showed up in this world as a naked, vulnerable one, a defenseless baby lying in the place where animals eat. Talk about utter relationship! Naked vulnerability means I'm going to let you influence me; I'm going to allow you to change me. The Way of Jesus is an invitation to a Trinitarian way of living, loving, and relating—on earth as it is in the Godhead. We are intrinsically like the Trinity, living in absolute relatedness. To choose to stand outside of this Flow is the deepest and most

obvious meaning of sin. We call the Flow love. We really were made for love, and outside of it we die very quickly.

Whatever is going on in God is a *flow*, a *radical relatedness*, a *perfect communion* between Three—a circle dance of love. God is Absolute Friendship. God is not just a dancer; God is the dance itself. This pattern mirrors the perpetual orbit of electron, proton, and neutron that creates every atom, which is the substratum of the entire physical universe. Everything is indeed like "the image and likeness of God" (Genesis 1:26-27).

Continued from page 22

our salvation. Jesus asked if there might be some other way, but there was none.¹⁴ Salvation comes to us only through God himself entering the human world to suffer the consequences of sin, to free us from sin, as his gift to us.

Most religions teach some form of works as the path of salvation—saying the right prayers, doing the right things, hoping it will be enough. They each teach that theirs is the right way. They teach that people can be good enough if they try hard enough. But Christianity teaches that we all need grace because we cannot be good enough no matter what we do or how hard we try.

It is impossible for both ideas to be true at the same time. The doctrine of grace teaches, whether we like it or not, that no other paths lead to salvation. We either rely on what we do, or we rely on what God has done in Jesus Christ.

Future grace

What about people who die without hearing about Jesus? What about people who lived before Jesus was born, or in a land thousands of miles away? Do they have any hope?

Yes—precisely because the Christian gospel is the gospel of grace. People are saved by God's grace, not by pronouncing the name "Jesus" or having special knowledge or special formulas. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, whether they know it or not.¹⁵ His death was an atoning sacrifice for everyone.

We are confident that God "wants everyone to come to repentance."¹⁶ Although his ways and times are often unknown to us, we nonetheless trust him to love the humans he has made. Jesus said: "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."¹⁷

We believe that the resurrected Christ has conquered

death, and therefore not even death can prevent him from leading people to trust him for salvation. We don't know the hows or whens, but we can trust him. Therefore, we can believe that one way or another, he urges every person who ever lived, or whoever will live, to trust in him for salvation. That might be before they die, at the point of death, or even after they die. At the last judgment, if some people turn to Christ in faith when they at last learn what he has done for them, then he will not turn them away.

But no matter when people are saved, or how well they understand it, it is only through Christ that they can be saved. Well-intentioned good works will never save anyone, no matter how sincerely people believe that they can be saved if they try hard enough. The reason that we need grace, and Jesus' sacrifice, is because no amount of good works, no amount of religious deeds, can ever save anyone. If such a path could have been devised, then God would have done it.¹⁸

If people have sincerely tried to attain salvation by working, meditating, flagellating, self-immolating or any other humanly devised means, then they will learn that their works have not earned them anything with God. Salvation is by grace, and only by grace. The Christian gospel teaches that no one can earn it, and yet it is available to all.

No matter what religious path a person has been on, Christ can rescue them from it and set them on his own path. He is the only Son of God, who provided the only atoning sacrifice that

everyone needs. He is the unique channel of God's grace and salvation. This is what Jesus himself taught as true. Jesus is exclusive and inclusive at the same time—the narrow way and the Saviour of the entire world—the only way of salvation, yet available for all.

God's grace, shown most perfectly in Jesus Christ, is exactly what everyone needs, and the good news is that it is freely given to all. It's great news, and it's worth sharing. □

The Plain Truth Magazine

THE PLAIN TRUTH SUBSCRIPTION POLICY

The Plain Truth is only sent to those who request for a free subscription. If you have been put on our mailing list without your knowledge or personal request, or someone else has subscribed on your behalf, please notify us immediately and we will remove your name from the subscription list and stop sending the magazine to you.

TO VOLUNTEER: If you live in the vicinity of Klang and would like to volunteer in packaging the magazine for mailing, please WhatsApp **PTMagazine** or SMS Susan Low 017-2559244

FOR FREE SUBSCRIPTION (within Malaysia & Singapore only), please:

1. WhatsApp **PTMagazine**
 2. SMS Susan Low 017-2559244 (Malaysia) / Anna 96495257 (Singapore)
 2. Or email your request to: ptasiamy@gmail.com
-

TO READ THE MAGAZINE ONLINE, please visit www.gci-malaysia.org

TO CANCEL SUBSCRIPTION, please:

1. WhatsApp **PTMagazine**
 2. SMS Susan Low 017-2559244 (Malaysia) / Anna 96495257 (Singapore)
 2. Or email your request to: ptasiamy@gmail.com giving your name, address and reference number.
-

TO DONATE

1. Electronically: The Plain Truth A/C No: 8001-8514-59 (CIMB BANK BHD)
 2. By Cheque: The Plain Truth, P O Box 2043, Pusat Bisnes Bukit Raja, Pos Malaysia Bhd., 40800 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia
(For receipts, please WhatsApp **PTMagazine** giving payment details.)
-