

# THE Plain Truth

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A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Apr - Jun 2019

Jesus – Our Complete Salvation Package. P. 06

God holds our tears in a bottle. P. 20

Building Relationships. P. 21

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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# One Death, One Resurrection

Many dailies carry an obituary column listing recent deaths with their photographs, birth and death dates, and some words of encouragement and hope for their loved ones. Some routinely skip this column because it reminds them of their own death.

We wish the dailies also carry a resurrection column listing the names of all those who had risen to life! That would make great news - but is that really possible?

Well, one person's death and resurrection has made that a reality. His name is Jesus Christ. His script, the Bible, has a resurrection column and the good news is your name is in it!

## One for all

Because Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, the entire human race is bound up in him, albeit mystically. Here are some verses that confirm this truth:

"All things have been created through Him [Christ] and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him *all things hold together*."<sup>1</sup>

"...the fullness of Him *who fills all in all*...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all *who is over all and through all and in all*."<sup>2</sup>

"For in him we live and move and have our being."<sup>3</sup>

Because all humanity is bound up in Him, everyone is included in His life, death, resurrection and ascension.

## One death

As Jesus represents humanity, His death is humanity's death. He took all our sins—past, present and future, as well as 'light' and 'heinous' sins—into himself and destroyed them on the cross. That's why scripture tells us, when He died we died.

Apostle Paul tells us, "...one [Jesus] died for all, and therefore *all* died<sup>4</sup> ...just as sin entered the world through one man [first Adam], and death through sin, ... death came to *all* people, because all sinned."<sup>5</sup>

Jesus did not just die *for* us, but He died *as* us. Our old, sinful man died with Christ on the cross. Because he died (our death), we don't have to live that old, sinful life anymore. That's why Paul tells us, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: The old has gone, the new is here!"<sup>6</sup>

## One resurrection

Jesus died, but He rose from the grave and manifested to His disciples over a period of 40 days in different ways and settings – proving beyond any shadow of doubt - that he indeed rose from death. The risen Christ



By  
Dr. P. Sellappan

ascended into heaven and sat at the right hand of God in power, glory and majesty.

Jesus didn't enter heaven solo (alone). He took all humanity with him. That means, we too are seated with him in power, glory and majesty. While it appears surreal, that is what He has accomplished for us, whether we believe, feel or experience it or not. That is the truth about our life.

That's why scripture declares boldly, when he rose we rose, when he ascended we ascended. As He sat at the right hand of God, so too we. That's how God sees us in the spiritual realm. Thanks to Jesus who has made all these possible.

Apostle Paul declares, "For if, by the trespass of the *one* man [first Adam], death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ [last Adam]! Therefore, just as one trespass resulted in the condemnation of all people, so also one righteous act resulted in the justification and life for all people. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many [all] were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many [all] are made righteous."<sup>7</sup>

## Jesus sums up our life

As a human representative, Jesus has included all humanity in his life, death, resurrection and ascension. What God accomplished for us in Christ is the truth about our life. We call this the *objective truth*. That truth is not based on our feelings or experiences.

Our feelings and experiences don't always reflect this truth. We still sin, have pains and aches, and fears and worry. We call this *subjective personal experience*. While our personal experiences may still be way off from the objective truth (realized in Christ), we can trust the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, transform us, and take us ever closer to the objective truth.

Our righteousness is solely based on what Christ has accomplished for us on the cross (the objective truth), not our good works or good behaviour. That means, our salvation is absolutely guaranteed. Living a Godly life led by the Holy Spirit, however, will make our life more joyful and satisfying.

In his life, death and resurrection, Jesus has included the entire human race. *We died and rose with him*. Waking up to that spiritual reality and participating in his resurrected life is what the gospel is about. □

<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1:16–17

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 1:22–23; 5:6

<sup>3</sup> Acts 17:28

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:14–15

<sup>5</sup> Romans 5:12

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

<sup>7</sup> Romans 5:17–19

# THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding



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

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

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

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# What our readers say:

As I read your October 2018 issue in my morning devotion time, especially the article on 'Partnering with God' it related to the day's Bible passage in Romans, chapter 8. How well it conveyed the purpose of human life on earth! Please keep up your good work. I have banked in a small donation today.

## **Selvanathan Pakianathan**

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 and benefit. I am making a small contribution of RM100. Hope it helps. God bless the Plain Truth ministry.

## **Looi Chun Cheong Taiping**

A small donation for the good work that you are doing for the community.

## **K. P. Thomas Kulai**

I thank you for sending me the Plain Truth without fail and I'm truly grateful. Attached please find the receipt of my contribution (RM100) toward the Plain Truth ministry. Thank you and God Bless.

## **Joo Hen Sin**

*Ed: Thank you for your generous contribution – greatly appreciated! Your support will certainly help us share the gospel with many more people.*

What a magazine that is filled with so many good articles. How can you afford sending such a quality magazine free to thousands every issue? I love the magazine and thank you for your generosity.

## **Anonymous Selangor**

The Plain Truth articles are well researched and written; they give us a fresh perspective of the gospel.

## **Steven Tee Kuala Lumpur**

The Plain Truth has improved my spiritual life, increased my knowledge, and helped me know more about God's love.

## **Lim Hup Keng Shah Alam**

I find The Plain Truth very helpful. Being a Hindu, I have many relatives and friends who are of the Christian faith. As such, I have the desire to learn more about Christianity in

order to understand my Christian friends and relatives so I can live in harmony with them.

## **N Mahadevan Kuala Lumpur**

The articles are very useful and help me to a better understanding of God and His ways and know Him better.

## **David Wong Petaling Jaya**

The Plain Truth is informative and practical to our daily life!

## **T Janemary Klang**

The Plain Truth articles are well researched and written; they give us a fresh perspective of the gospel.

## **Steven Tee Kuala Lumpur**

The Plain Truth illuminates God's word powerfully. The articles are simple to read and understand. They have profound effect on my life and reminds me that the most important aspect of our life is our personal relationship with Christ. It is my earnest prayer that the magazine is able to sustain its good works through the contributions from various sources.

## **Peggy Wong Petaling Jaya**

The Plain Truth is informative; it has helped me in my spiritual walk. The stories have touched my heart and has changed me. The articles are good for both believers and nonbelievers.

## **A Rajeswary Kepong**

The Plain Truth covers a wide range of topics. The articles are useful, informative, motivating and challenging.

## **Librarian Kuala Lumpur**

The articles are useful for modern living. They help us see things with spiritual eyes.

## **Abraham Lincoln Sungai Siput**

The Plain Truth has filled my spiritual needs. It provides spiritual truths and practical Christian principles. It is informative, relevant, and thought provoking. It helps me to become knowledgeable and mature in understanding the Word of God. It helps me to grow in faith in God and teaches me

to look to the Almighty in times of pain and suffering.

## **Rayappan Joseph Ipoh**

The Plain Truth has challenged my beliefs and has enhanced my faith in God. May God's blessing be with all you faithful servants of God.

## **Francis Tan Singapore**

The Plain Truth is enlightening, relevant, inspirational and reassuring.

## **Dr. Mah Peh Yong Kuala Lumpur**

I am glad The Plain Truth continues to be a reader-friendly publication that presents its message clearly and simply. I look forward to seeing the magazine reach many. Malaysians need a positive, bible-based message, especially in today's very materialistic society. I believe your publication can play this role. I pray for your ministry and may God bless the fruits of your faithful labour.

## **Robert Kee Klang**

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:

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Jalan Dato Hamzah (Branch)  
12-14 Jalan Dato Hamzah  
41700 Klang,  
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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:  
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# Good Friday and Easter Sunday

Each spring, we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus. These are pivotal celebrations because all that we believe and hope for hinges on the events commemorated by Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

Some sincere people put great emphasis on getting the details surrounding these events correct. Much has been written about the exact year, or precise date, or precise chronology of Jesus' arrest, trial, death and resurrection. Though most accept that Jesus was crucified on a Friday, others insist that it was a Wednesday or a Thursday. Some argue over whether Jesus was in the tomb for three days and three nights or just parts of those days. Some believe we should not celebrate the orthodox Christian days at all, insisting that the Old Testament observances are the only correct way to remember Jesus' sacrifice.

I once thought these details were important and spent far too much time trying to resolve them. I now see that it was time wasted. I don't mean to suggest that the details are insignificant. The events of Jesus' last week were carefully orchestrated by God so that prophecies of the Messiah could be fulfilled. However, if we try to establish an exact chronology, some of these questions cannot be resolved definitively, because there is some ambiguity in the scriptural record. However, even if the precise details had been recorded with the attention to chronological detail that we expect today, the details really do not matter. What is important is *what* happened, not *when*.

If, about 2000 years ago, Jesus the Son of God incarnate was executed and then later resurrected, the destiny of every human being has been changed forever. If he was not, then, as Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "Our preaching is useless and so is your faith." In that letter, Paul reminded his readers that if indeed Jesus had been resurrected from the dead, "Then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'" Here Paul was quoting from Isaiah 25:8:

"He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken."

That was probably a popular scripture. It is poetic and concise. Had Hallmark been in operation then, they probably would have



By  
Dr. Joseph  
Tkach

put the saying on bereavement cards. Paul was showing the Corinthians that it was no mere pious platitude. Because of Jesus, what Isaiah prophesied became reality. Death had in fact been swallowed up in victory and thus Paul could write confidently: "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"<sup>2</sup>

Death—any death—does have a sting. If a particular death does not affect us personally, it might only be a small sting and the pain doesn't last long. Tragedies like a senseless shooting at a school leave us all hurting for some time. The pain of the death of a loved one goes even deeper.

Our Christian worldview gives us comfort in knowing that there is more to life than what we experience in our mortal bodies. Jesus taught that there is an afterlife, and he promised that he would go and prepare a place for us. Knowing that death is not the end for our loved ones moderates the terrible pain of loss, so that we need not "sorrow as those who have no hope." However, it does not take away the entire ache. We still suffer the loss of not having their companionship and presence with us while we are still alive and they are dead.

This is why death is the enemy, and even though Jesus has conquered this enemy, we still feel some of its sting when a loved one dies or when we see innocent children murdered. Though we shed tears over death, we are reassured in Psalm 56:8 that God is aware of them all: "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle...list my tears on your scroll—are



# Jesus—Our Complete Salvation Package

Near the end of his Gospel, the apostle John made these intriguing comments: “Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book.... If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” Given these comments, and noting differences among the four Gospels, we conclude that these accounts were not written to be exhaustive records of Jesus’ life. John says his purpose in writing was that “you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). The focus of the Gospels is to tell the good news about Jesus and the salvation that is ours in him.

Though John attributes salvation (life) to the name of Jesus, it’s common for Christians to speak of being saved by Jesus’ death. Though this short-hand statement is correct, relating salvation exclusively to Jesus’ death can stunt our understanding of the fullness of who Jesus is and all he has done to save us. The events of Holy Week remind us that Jesus’ death, though vital, is part of a larger story that includes our Lord’s incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension. All these are intrinsic, inseparable milestones of Jesus’ one redemptive work—the work that gives us life in his name. Let’s look to Jesus—our complete salvation package.

## Incarnation

Jesus’ birth was not the ordinary birth of an ordinary person. Unique in every way, it was the beginning of the Incarnation of God himself. In Jesus’ birth, God came among us as a human in the way all humans since Adam have been born. Remaining what he was, the eternal Son of God took on a whole human life, from beginning to end—birth to death. In his one Person, Jesus is both fully divine and fully human. In this stunning statement we find an eternity’s worth of significance that merits an eternity of appreciation.

Through the Incarnation, the eternal Son of God stepped out of eternity and into his creation of space and time to become a man of flesh and blood: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” Jesus was indeed a genuine full-fledged man, but at the same time he was fully God—one in being with the Father and Spirit. The birth of Jesus fulfills many prophecies and is the promise of our salvation.



By  
Dr. Joseph  
Tkach

The Incarnation did not end with Jesus’ birth—it continued throughout his earthly life, and continues today in his glorified human life. The Son of God incarnate (in the flesh), remains one in being with the Father and Spirit—the fullness of the whole God is present and active in Jesus—making the human life of Jesus uniquely significant. As Romans 8:3-4 says,

“What the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

Paul further explains that we are “saved through his life.” The life and work of Jesus are inseparable—they are all part of the Incarnation. The God-man Jesus is the perfect high priest and mediator between God and humanity because he partook of human nature and reclaimed humanity by living a sinless life. His sinless life helps us understand how he can maintain a relationship with both God and other humans. While we typically celebrate his birth at Christmas, the events in Jesus’ whole life are always part of our worship. His life reveals the relational nature of our salvation. Jesus brought together, in his own person, God and humanity in perfect relationship.



## Death

For some, the short-hand declaration, we are saved by Jesus' death, carries with it the unfortunate misconception that Jesus' death was a sacrifice that conditioned God into being gracious. I pray that we all see the fallacy of this notion.

T.F. Torrance writes that with a proper understanding of the Old Testament sacrifices, we will see Jesus' death not as a pagan offering for the sake of forgiveness, but as a powerful witness to the will of a merciful God (Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ, pages 38-39). Pagan systems of sacrifice were based on retribution, but Israel's was based on reconciliation. Under Israel's system, rather than sacrifices and offerings being given to earn forgiveness, God provided them to cover for and remove the people's sin so that they would be reconciled to God.

Israel's sacrificial system was designed to make manifest and to witness to God's love and mercy, pointing to the purpose of Jesus' death, which is reconciliation with the Father. His death also defeated Satan and the power of death: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." Paul adds that Jesus "must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death." Jesus' death is the atoning part of our salvation.

## Resurrection

Each Easter Sunday, we celebrate Jesus' resurrection, which fulfills many Old Testament prophecies. The author of Hebrews tells us that Isaac being saved from death is a picture of resurrection. The book of Jonah tells us that Jonah was inside the sea monster "three days and three nights." Jesus related that event to his death, burial and resurrection.

Continued from page 5

they not in your record?" Whatever the translation, the point is clear: God knows our pain and suffering down to the details and has promised to eventually remove them forever.

I have been pondering the phrase that John wrote in Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." Like Paul, John was reminding us of the reality of the promise in Isaiah 25:8. Consider how important that promise is. If God did not wipe away all tears from our eyes, there would be ongoing cause for weeping.

Most certainly, we'd weep over our past sins, the wasted opportunities while we were upon the earth, as well as our acts of unkindness toward others. We would weep much about the old order of things. But God says there will be no more death and the old order has passed away. In the fullness of God's kingdom, every cause of grief will be removed. In our glorified life, there will be no more death to part loving hearts. There will be no more sorrow of any kind. There will be no more

We celebrate Jesus' resurrection with great joy because it reminds us that death is not permanent. It's a temporary step toward our future—eternal life in communion with God. At Easter we celebrate Jesus' victory over death and the new life we will have in him. We look forward to the time spoken of in Revelation 21:4: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." The resurrection is the hope of our salvation.

## Ascension

Jesus' birth led to his life, and his life led to his death. But we cannot divorce his death from his resurrection and we cannot separate his resurrection from his ascension. Jesus didn't just come out of the grave and live as a human being. Now a glorified human, Jesus ascended to the Father, and it was not until that great event occurred that he finished the work he started.

In the introduction to Torrance's book Atonement, Robert Walker wrote this: "The ascension is Jesus' taking of our humanity in his person into the presence of God into the union and communion of the love of the Trinity." C.S. Lewis put it this way: "In the Christian story God descends to re-ascend" (Miracles, chapter 14, paragraph 5). The glorious good news is that in ascending, Jesus took us up with him: "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."

Incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension—all vital parts of our salvation and thus our worship. These milestones point to all that Jesus has accomplished for us through his whole life and whole work. Let's take in more and more of who Jesus is and all of what he has done for us. He is our complete salvation package. □

crying for any reason. There will be no more pain of any sort. Instead, there will be fullness of life—a sharing in God's own kind of eternal light and love.

This is why Jesus allowed himself to be tortured and executed, only to be resurrected shortly thereafter. What he did for us he did freely and with confidence in his heavenly Father. And so we read of him: "Who for the joy set before him, endured the cross."<sup>4</sup>

The precise chronology of Holy Week is not the important issue (if it had been important, surely God would have made it clearer). What is important is what Jesus did to fulfill the specific prophecies of the Messiah, like those given by Isaiah. Jesus changed the very nature of death and opened a pathway to our future hope when all things are made new.<sup>5</sup>

That is what Jesus did and that is what we should focus on as we commemorate the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. □

- 1 1 Corinthians 15:14
- 2 1 Corinthians 15:55
- 3 1 Thessalonians 4:13
- 4 Hebrews 12:2
- 5 Revelation 21:5

# Believing The Gospel



Many Christians are afraid of the gospel. We are afraid of the gospel because it is too good. Many of us are more comfortable with religion than we are with the gospel. We prefer to read the Bible as a divine rulebook that guards the entrance to the kingdom than to read it as God's witness to his redemption of the whole cosmos through his Son.

We prefer to think that when God breathed the life of his Word into the Bible, he was merely creating a religion—a divine formula to show humans what things to do and not to do in order to get on God's good side and stay there.

But the gospel is not a new and improved religion. The gospel is an affront to religion. It is the end of religion, the end of all systems of works designed to make us acceptable to God. The gospel, by contrast, tells us that God himself has already, through Jesus Christ, made us acceptable. The gospel is good news; religion is bad news; and the gospel wins. Christ is victorious. Sin is vanquished.

We are overcomers only in Christ, not in our overcoming anything. We are sinners, always have been and will continue to be to the day we die. Whatever we may have overcome is like removing a spoonful of sand from the beach. Unless and until we are found in Christ, we remain dead in our sins. And we are found in Christ only by trusting him to be for us who he says he is and

By  
Dr. J. Michael  
Fezell

to do for us what he says he does. Only when we trust him will we accept his gift of mercy and life, and only when we wake up to our sinfulness will we trust him.

As long as we think we are "doing OK," or that we "aren't all that bad" or that we are "making progress" or even that we will never be "good enough," we will not trust him. All such thinking is trusting not him, but ourselves. It is thinking that his acceptance of us is based on how well we behave. It is thinking that if we do better, then he will accept us, or conversely, that he accepts us because we have been overcoming.

God accepts us because he wants to accept us, and not because we have measured up. God dealt with our sin by the blood of Christ, not by giving us a new and improved law code. We are justified because God justified us himself, personally, through his Son. God did for us in Christ what we could not do for ourselves, and he calls on us to trust *him* to be our righteousness.<sup>1</sup>

That means we do not have righteousness. It is not just a matter that we "have got some problems." It is not just a matter that we have "a few things to overcome." It is not even a matter of "putting sin out of our lives." It is a matter of understanding that



we are hopeless losers, sinners through and through, and that even our “good” deeds are thoroughly laced with selfish impurity. Until we see that, until we see ourselves for what we really are, we will not trust him who alone saves sinners.

### Fear of the gospel

Many Christians are afraid of the gospel because it puts everybody on the same level—“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”<sup>2</sup> That means we, being sinners ourselves, have no ground to feel spiritually superior to people who do things that disgust and offend us. Others are afraid of the gospel because the gospel requires them to believe that God will save them in spite of their sins. We have a hard time trusting God to do exactly what he promised to do—forgive us our sins.

We want to prove to him we can “do it.” We want to show him we’ll be faithful, that we will be obedient, that we will be “good Christians.” But the truth is, we won’t be. We will sin, and we will sin again, and again. And until we believe the gospel, instead of some fairy tale about having to please God before he will accept us, we will not enter God’s rest. God saves us; changes in our behavior do not.

We can live in misery, struggling to be found worthy by perfect obedience and constantly failing and fearing that God is waiting to squash us like flies, or we can trust his Word. (Or even worse, we can live in appalling arrogance, actually believing that we are worthily obeying God and trusting him to accept us for our “holy deeds.”)

God is our salvation; our improved behavior is not. To repent is to turn to God and away from ourselves. It is to concede that we are sinners and that we need God’s mercy. It is to trust God to be faithful to his word of grace spoken in his Son before the world began. It is to remove our little homemade crown and hand it over to our Maker, the author of eternal salvation.

God is our righteousness; our illusion of good behavior is not. When we come to see our righteousness as filthy rags, as indeed it is, then we can begin to see our need for God’s grace and mercy. When we believe his word of salvation in his Son, then we can begin to trust him to forgive all our sins and save us.

### Trusting God

Why is it so hard to trust God to forgive us and to make us his perfectly righteous children in Christ? Perhaps one reason is because we can’t stand to think of ourselves as, or to think that others might

think of us as, bald-faced sinners. We prefer the façade of pretending to be good, decent folks. But we are not good, decent folks. Nobody is good, decent folks. At best, we are less destructive and wicked than we could be if we let ourselves go entirely.

Have you ever noticed that if you behave decently for a day or two, you begin to feel like you are a pretty good person after all? And conversely, if your natural self gets loose for few minutes and you behave like the ratbag you are, then you feel depressed, disappointed and frustrated that you are not as grand as you had been imagining?

But what is there to be disappointed about? Why, given what you are, were you expecting not to behave accordingly from time to time? Our disappointment ought to be in our failure to honor the God of our salvation, not in our failure to look impeccable to ourselves and others. If it were, then we would be free to see more clearly that in spite of our sin, we can rest in the atonement of Christ, for our sins are forgiven in him. The reason we need a Savior is because we need saving. The gospel declares that God has indeed saved us through Christ. In fact, Christ died for us ungodly people while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8).

Now please don’t tell me that we “were” sinners, but now we are not to be sinners anymore. Please drop the rhetoric. *We are* sinners. *We do* still sin after conversion. Every Christian who ever lived continues to sin after conversion. That doesn’t make sin OK. It doesn’t condone sin. It is simply a fact, and one we would all do much better to just admit and quit pretending that if we try hard enough we will become sinless.

There is one way, of course, in which we are not sinners. As believers we are in Christ, and as such we are not sinners in the sense that God does not count



our sins against us.<sup>3</sup> In other words, when we do not pretend that we are not sinners, but instead put our trust in Jesus Christ who saves sinners, God does not count our sins against us.<sup>4</sup>

## Overcomers

What must we do about sin? We must trust God to forgive our sins. We must *trust him!* He is our only hope. We are sinners, and unless God forgives our sins, we come under the condemnation all sinners deserve. We are not going to stop being sinners. I'm sure you have tried, like I have, and discovered that despite occasional bouts of improvement, sin is still alive and well in your life. But God says that if we trust him he will take care of our sins and *he* will count us righteous in *Christ* who, *for our sakes*, became the perfect human.

The Bible is not a rulebook for new and improved religion. It is the Word of God, God's chosen revelation of himself to us, declaring to us that in Jesus Christ he has dealt with the sins of the world so that whoever trusts him will be saved. That is good news. It is the gospel. It is not religion. Don't be afraid of it.

I know. You're still waiting for me to say something about the importance of behaving right. But I'm not going to. At least not in the way you are probably used to. We are overcomers in Christ alone; when it comes to godly overcoming, there is no other way to be an overcomer.

When you trust Christ to be your righteousness, your behavior will be set by the Holy Spirit on the road to improvement, regardless of whether you constantly set "overcoming goals" for yourself. But if you try to improve your behavior without trusting Christ to be your only righteousness, you may or may not be successful, and whether or not you are won't make a hill of beans of difference in terms of your standing with God.

In other words, salvation is not based on what you do; it is based on what God has already done. When you trust God, you are in Christ, and when you are in Christ, God does not count your sins against you. If you do not trust God, you are still in your sins, because you are not in Christ.

## Priorities

Here's a gospel tip: don't make behaving better your main goal in life. If you do, you'll always be frustrated, disappointed in yourself and miserable, not to mention a judgmental and obnoxious prig. You're welcome to it if you want it, of course. But will-powering yourself into a better you is a no-win life goal. Will-power goodness is the root of religion; it has no place in the gospel.

Instead, make your main goal in life knowing and trusting in the Lord your God for absolutely everything, including your behavior. When you do that, your preoccupation with yourself and how good you are will fade, and your eyes will begin to open to the righteousness of God and the joy and peace of his kingdom. The Holy Spirit will reorder your priorities, and the pain your sins naturally cause in your life will more readily drive you to God for mercy and help to overcome.

Let me say it another way: Work on yourself and make every effort to change for the better—but *not because you think it will make you less a sinner and get you in good with God*. Take overcoming seriously. Do

it because God wants you to, because Jesus Christ gave you a new life, because it is right, because everybody who loves you wants you to, and because it will make your life much more blessed, rewarding, peaceful and pleasant. But don't do it because you think that's how you will get into the kingdom of God. It isn't.

Regardless of how much you improve (and you need a *lot* of improvement—I know you; you're just like me), you are still a sinner, and the only hope of salvation you've got is the mercy of God along with his word that in Christ he extends it to you. Trust *him*, not your good life, when it comes to salvation. When it comes to salvation, trust the word of God that in Christ it is a *fait accompli*; when it comes to behavior, trust yourself to the supervision of the Holy Spirit and put your heart into overcoming.

Don't think that good behavior results in salvation; but know that salvation results in good behavior. But don't let that make you think that poor behavior equals unsaved and good behavior equals saved. It simply does not work that way; don't forget that we all still sin. Sin involves not merely acts but attitudes, and God knows even the deepest secrets of our hearts.

Rest in this: God loves you; he's proven it in Christ, and he will make you into what he wants you to be. You can trust him to do it. Get to know him. Spend time with him. Put your confidence in him. Make him the priority in your life, and you will begin to find his love influencing the way you live in the world and the way you interact with others.

Whether we experience hardship or ease, prosperity or poverty, bad times or good times (and Christians experience them all), our ability to cope with what comes our way will depend on our trust in God. But all the while, because we are in Christ, our salvation is not in question. We are saved by God's grace through faith, and even our faith is God's gracious gift to us.

Remember, the gospel is good news. It is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, as Hebrews 10:23 encourages us, "Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful."□

1 1 Corinthians 1:30

2 Romans 3:23

3 Romans 4:8

4 1 Timothy 1:15

5 Romans 1:16

# The Divine Focus

The gospel of Matthew tells of an event where wise men from the East came to Jerusalem seeking a child whom they referred to as the King of the Jews. These men were divinely guided by a star that brought them to the location where Jesus was born. There in a manger, wrapped with swaddling cloths, lay the infant Jesus.<sup>1</sup> An angel had previously revealed to them that this baby was the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. Jesus was born not during peaceful times but in the time of King Herod. This king was so troubled when he heard about Jesus being born that he commanded that all male children who were in Bethlehem and all its districts, from two years old and under to be put to death.<sup>2</sup> A horrifying infanticide occurred in Bethlehem because of the fear of one man that his rule and power was under threat.

Today we live under such dangerous conditions as terrorism, war, disease, poverty, prejudice, crime and hate. Any such dangers can strike at any time. Added to these dangers is suspicion and hate towards those who do not follow the same religious beliefs. Every new year brings hope of a better time and people make all sorts of resolutions and promises to change. But hardly anything changes, the dangers remain, perhaps becoming even more pronounced. Where does one find the strength and endurance to meet these uncertain realities?

The answer to that is the Jesus who was born as a human being, yet is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is the Lord God Himself who had humbled Himself to become man, so as to exalt us human beings into a relationship with Him. His presence brings forth repentance as we turn our hearts and minds from the things of this world to set our sights on following Him. Life is now found down a different road, a road so different from the one we had been following. All the signboards on this new road draw our attention to Jesus who is the author and perfecter of our faith because he endured the suffering on the cross, having borne the shame of our sins and is now at the right hand of the throne of God the Father.<sup>3</sup> Therefore we now look away from all the overwhelming cloud of danger and focus our attention on Him.

We embark on a holy habit of continuous and sustained focus, filling our gaze on Him as He leads us through the uncertainties of life. There is a story of a



By  
**Devaraj Ramoo**

man who decided to go on a challenging hike in the Swiss Alps. He hired an experienced guide to lead him. After trekking for hours, they approached a path that had been almost washed out. They were facing sheer rock cliffs on either side and the man felt his heart fill with fear as his knees buckled. Looking at the cliffs, he began to tremble where at this point his guide shouted to him. "Keep your eyes on me, where I put my feet, you do the same. Do not look down." The man put his entire focus on his guide, followed his every instruction and found himself safely on the other side. None of us knows what lies ahead of us. We have made our plans, set our dreams but unexpected and terrifying circumstances may arise. When we approach the dangerous washed out path with sheer cliffs on either side, where do we find help?

Well, we have a choice. We can fall down the cliffs with our eyes open or we can fix our eyes on Jesus Christ and put our feet where He had put his steps and follow in faith. If we choose to follow His steps, we will find ourselves having been kept safe through His wonderful grace. You may ask, "Why Jesus? The answer is that He is the resurrection and the life."<sup>4</sup> He made our salvation possible through the suffering that He went through at the cross. When He died at the cross, it was not over, for then His resurrection bodily from death brought the joy of triumphing over the power of death. Death no longer has power over humanity for just as Christ rose from the dead so too will all who follow Him.

Now the name of Jesus has been exalted, given the highest honour for through Him salvation has come to humanity. Hard times may come but mercy and kindness will follow all those who fix their eyes on Jesus. Do not let the circumstances rule your direction but keep your focus on Him and never look back. We are joined with the divine through Christ not because we have done good but by grace.

It's a living union where we have all that we need to finish our earthly course in life. Let Him be the hope of your life. This divine focus is what you need. Seek Him now. □



<sup>1</sup> Luke 2: 9-1

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 2:16

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 12:2

<sup>4</sup> John 11:25

# Pentecost: Prophec

**P**entecost celebrates the birth of the New Testament Church when God poured his Holy Spirit on Jesus' disciples. This event took place 50 days after Jesus' resurrection.

Anciently, Israel celebrated a type of this event during the Feast of Weeks. At the beginning of this feast (immediately after the Passover), the priest took the *first* sheaf of the harvest and waved before the Lord to be accepted *on behalf of the people*. Then, on the *fiftieth* day, the priest waved *another* wave sheaf for *the people* to be accepted by the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

The *first* wave sheaf offering pictured *God's acceptance of Jesus on our behalf and the second* wave sheaf offering pictured *God's acceptance of the Church (believers)*. These were shadows of Jesus' resurrection and the birth of the Church on the Day of Pentecost around AD 30.

## Two Prophecies

The Old Testament mentions two prophecies concerning the pouring of the Holy Spirit – one on a single individual and the other on *multitudes*. These prophecies would be fulfilled during New Testament times.

### First Prophecy

Isaiah prophesied that God would pour out his Spirit on a *single* individual - his *Servant*, his *Elect*.<sup>2</sup> This referred to Jesus when he would take on human form and receive the Spirit. He would be the firstfruit of the spiritual harvest (as symbolized by the *first wave sheaf offering*).

*Why did God pour out his Spirit on his Elect (Jesus)?* Isaiah gives us the reason:

*"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one [Elect] in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice [restoration] to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. [He will not come to condemn and judge them]. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. [He will identify with us in our suffering and pain] In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. [He will not give up or fail in his mission.] In his teaching the islands will put their hope. [The whole world will put their hope in him.]"*

*"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted [heal], to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound [to set people free from bondage]; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour [God's grace and kindness],... to comfort all who mourn; to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness [made righteousness], the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified."*



By  
Dr. P. Sellappan

Yes, the Holy Spirit would empower Jesus to go and preach the gospel and bring good tidings – deliverance from bondage, justice [restoration], liberty, healing, comfort and hope.

### Second Prophecy

Joel too prophesied that God would pour out his Spirit, but on *multitudes*.<sup>3</sup> This referred to the New Testament Church (believers) who would receive his Spirit 50 days *after* Jesus' resurrection – after Jesus had received the Spirit on their behalf (as symbolized by the *second wave sheaf offering*).

*Why did God pour out his Spirit on his Church?* Joel gives us the reason:



*"Afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people [all nations]. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days...And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved."*

Here, Joel is telling us that many nations would hear the gospel (in their *own tongue/ language*), believe, and receive the Holy Spirit. This includes men and women, young and old, manservants and maidservants, and Jews and Gentiles. Where access to gospel would be restricted or difficult (because of persecution), they would hear in dreams and visions. Those who hear the name of the Lord and believe him would also be saved.

The Holy Spirit would empower the Church to go and fulfill the Great Commission – to go and preach the gospel to the ends of the earth, bring justice (restoration), freedom, healing, comfort, encouragement and hope.

*Let's recapitulate:* First, God would pour out his Spirit on his Elect (Jesus) to empower him to go and preach the gospel and bring deliverance, justice, freedom, healing and hope. But Jesus alone, limited by time and space, would not be able to reach the ends of the earth. Jesus would delegate that task to his Church. He would send

# ies and Fulfillments

his Spirit to empower believers to preach the gospel and make disciples everywhere. The same Spirit that empowered Jesus would empower his disciples to fulfill his mission to rescue and save the world.

## Fulfilled Prophecies

Jesus came to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy. When John the Baptist baptized Jesus, the Holy Spirit descended upon him like a dove and the Father declared, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus received the Holy Spirit *on behalf of the Church*. He received the Holy Spirit not because he needed it, but because *we needed it*. [Remember, Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit and was sinless and therefore needed



no baptism.] *Jesus was baptized for sinners like you and me. He repented for us, was baptized for us, and received the Holy Spirit for us. Jesus did all these for us, on our behalf.*

The Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to fulfill the threefold ministry:

1. Upward – to build intimate relationship, fellowship, and commune with God.
2. Inward – to edify, exhort, encourage and comfort his followers (Church).
3. Outward – to reach out to people who do not know God – the God revealed in Jesus.

*Upward* – Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, had intimate communion/fellowship with God. He loved God with all his heart, mind and soul. He obeyed and trusted God completely. He overcame temptations<sup>5</sup> and submitted to God's will even to the point of death.<sup>6</sup> He was *one* with the Father that he told the Pharisees, "*I and my Father are one; what the Father does, is what I do; I do only my Father's will*".

*Inward* – Jesus also built close bonds with his disciples. He called them and trained them for 3½ years. He taught them the mysteries of the kingdom of God and

sent them on mission trips - to preach the gospel, heal the sick, and cast out demons. He also exhorted and rebuked them for their unbelief. He had compassion on them. He encouraged and comforted them. He worked with them patiently till his death after which he would rise from the grave and send them his Spirit.

*Outward* – Jesus also preached the gospel to the masses. He had mercy and compassion on them. He healed the sick, cast out demons, fed the hungry, calmed the storm, and even raised the dead. He preached mainly to the Jews,<sup>7</sup> but he also preached to the Gentiles. For example, he preached to the Samaritan woman and those in her village.<sup>8</sup> He raised a gentile widow's only son from death. He healed a Roman soldier's dying servant. He healed a Canaanite woman's demon-possessed daughter. Even at his death, he shared kingdom insights with King Herod and Pontius Pilate. He even prayed, "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."

Thus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy.

The New Testament Church fulfilled (and continues to fulfill) Joel's prophecy when God poured out his Spirit on his followers on the Day of Pentecost.

Just before he ascended into heaven, Jesus told his disciples, "Remain in Jerusalem and you will receive the Holy Spirit so you can be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth."<sup>9</sup>

As the disciples waited in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit fell on them like flames of fire and they all began to speak to the multitudes (who had come from different nations) in their *own language* as the Spirit gave them utterance.<sup>10</sup>

The same Spirit that ministered to Jesus also ministers his Church today. The Spirit empowers believers to fulfill the same threefold ministry:

*Upward* – The Spirit empowers believers to build intimate relationship with God, fellowship/commune with God, and love and obey God. The Spirit helps us to trust God for all things. The Spirit also helps us to overcome our many weaknesses.

*Inward* – The Spirit empowers us to love one another, and forgive and be patient with one another. The Spirit helps us to exhort, inspire, comfort and edify one another. This often happens during church services, bible studies, retreats, and festivals.

*Outward* – The Spirit also empowers believers to go and share the gospel and make disciples so that they too might experience God's love, mercy, kindness and forgiveness. The Spirit convicts and leads people to Christ, who gives them eternal life and fellowship with God. The Spirit helps us realize what Christ has accomplished for them through his life, death, resurrection and ascension. The Spirit brings healing, comfort and hope to those who are lost.

On the day Pentecost, Peter, filled with the Spirit, preached Christ, and 3,000 people were converted.

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# The Gospel: It's not fair!

Jesus didn't carry any swords or spears. He didn't have an army behind him. His only weapons were his words, and it was his message that got him into trouble. He made people so angry that they wanted to kill him.

## A dangerous message

His message was seen not merely as wrong – it was dangerous. It was subversive. It threatened to upset the social world of Judaism. But what kind of message could make the religious leaders so angry that they would kill the messenger?

One idea that could anger the religious leaders is found in Matthew 9:13: "I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners." Jesus had a message of good news for sinners, but people who considered themselves good often thought that Jesus preached bad news.

Jesus invited prostitutes and tax collectors into the kingdom of God, and the good people didn't like that. "That's not fair," they may have said. "We have been working hard to be good, and why can they get into the kingdom without working hard? If you don't keep sinners out, it isn't fair!"

They thought that Jesus was saying that God is not fair. Even today, people don't like to hear that idea. Good Christian people want God to be fair – but he isn't. Most people think that fairness requires equal treatment for everyone, but when it comes to salvation, God simply isn't fair.

## More than fair

God is more than fair. His grace is far beyond anything we could deserve. God is generous, full of grace, full of mercy, loving us even though we don't deserve it.

That kind of message bothers religious leaders and all who say that the harder you work, the more you will get; if you behave better, you will get a better reward. Religious leaders like to have that kind of message, because it makes it easy to motivate people to work hard, do right, live right.

But Jesus says, It isn't so.

If you have dug a really deep pit for yourself, if you have messed up time and time again, if you have been the worst sort of sinner, you don't have to work your way out of the pit to be given salvation. God simply forgives you for the sake of Jesus. You don't have to deserve it –



By  
Dr. Joseph  
Tkach

God simply does it. You just need to believe it. You need to trust God, to take him at his word: Your million-dollar debt is removed from the record.

That is good news for ordinary people.

But it seems that some people are distressed at this kind of news. "Look, I've been working hard to get out of the pit," they might say, "and I am almost out. You mean to tell me that 'those' people are pulled out of the pit instantly, without having to do any work at all? That's not fair!"

No, grace is not "fair" – it is grace – it is a gift we did not deserve. God can be generous to whomever he wants to be generous to, and the good news is that he offers his generosity to everyone. It is fair in the sense that it extends to everyone, even though this means that he forgives some people a big debt, and some people a smaller debt – the same arrangement for all even though there are different circumstances.

## A parable of unfairness

Matthew 20 includes the parable of the workers in the vineyard. Some people worked all day long in the heat of the day. Some worked only half a day, and some worked only one hour, but they all got paid the same amount, a day's wage. Some got exactly what they agreed to, but others got more. However, the people who worked all day long said, "That's not fair. We worked all day long, and it's not fair to give the same amount of pay to those who worked less".

But the people who worked all day got exactly what they had agreed to before they began work. The only reason they got upset was because other people received more than they deserved.



What did the boss say? It was this: "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

The boss said they would be given a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, and they were – and yet they complained. Why? Because they compared themselves with others and other people the same pay for less work. They got their hopes up, and then they were disappointed.

But the landowner said: "I am doing you no wrong. If you think it's not fair, the problem is in what you expected, not in what you actually got. If it hadn't been for the amount I paid the newcomers, you would be quite happy with what I gave you. The problem is in your expectations, not in what I did. You accuse me of being bad, simply because I was *good to someone else*."

How would you react to this? What would you think if your boss gave a bonus to the newest employees, but not to the old faithful workers? It would not be very good for morale, would it? But Jesus was not giving us payroll advice here – he was telling a parable about the kingdom of God.

The parable reflected something that was happening in Jesus' ministry. God was giving salvation to people who hadn't worked very hard, and the religious leaders said: "That's not fair. You can't be generous to them. We've been working hard, and they have hardly been working." Jesus replied, "I am bringing good news to sinners, not to the righteous." His teaching threatened to undermine the normal motive for doing good.

<sup>1</sup> Luke 17:10

## Where do we fit in?

We might like to think that we have worked all day long, bearing the burdens and the heat of the day, deserving a good reward. But we have not.

It doesn't matter how long you've been in the church or how many sacrifices you have made – those are nothing in comparison to what God is giving us. Paul worked harder than any of us; he made more sacrifices for the gospel than we realize, but he counted it all as a loss for Christ. It was nothing.

The time we've spent in the church is nothing to God. The work we've done is nothing compared to what he can do. Even at our best, as another parable says, we are unprofitable servants.<sup>1</sup> Jesus has bought our entire lives; he has a fair claim on every thought and every action. We cannot possibly give him anything on top of that – even if we obey everything he commands.

We are like the workers who worked only one hour and got a whole day's wage. We just barely got started, and we were paid like we actually did something useful. Is that fair? Maybe we shouldn't even ask the question. If the judgment is in our favor, we shouldn't ask for another opinion!

Do we think of ourselves as people who have worked long and hard? Do we think we deserve more than we are getting? Or do we see ourselves as people who are getting an undeserved gift, regardless of how long we've worked? ☐

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Soon the number swelled to 5000. The disciples also performed many miracles and the number of followers grew daily. Since then, 2000 years later, the gospel today has gone to the ends of the earth. Millions have received Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior.

Peter and his companions were sent to preach to the Jews primarily. Paul, Barnabas, Silas and Timothy were sent to preach to the Gentiles. For example: Peter preached to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost, but he also preached to Cornelius and his household. Philip shared Christ with the Ethiopian eunuch. Paul and his companions preached to the Gentiles - jailor and his household, Romans, King Agrippa, Governor Felix, and the people of Cypress. Thomas preached Christ in India. And the list goes on.

The gospel today has gone to the ends of the earth. By using modern technology, pastors in each nation are spreading the gospel faster than ever before. Prisoners are hearing the gospel. Remote villagers are hearing the gospel. Cities are hearing the gospel. All nations are hearing the gospel *in their own language*. The Holy Spirit is sweeping through the nations, revealing Jesus,

and what he has done for them. The Spirit is drawing people to Christ and uniting them with God, so they too might experience God's love, mercy, kindness and goodness.

*Let's recapitulate:* The Old Testament prophesied that God would pour out his Holy Spirit first on his Elect (Jesus), and then on multitudes (the Church). These prophecies were fulfilled in the New Testament. Jesus first received the Spirit on behalf of *all* people. Then, from heaven, he poured out his Spirit on the Church. That work continues on today, and will continue on till the second coming of Christ.

*The Church today is participating in what Christ has accomplished for all humanity by the power of the Holy Spirit. And he has poured his Spirit on the church to continue his mission – to bring reconciliation, to bring restoration, to set people free, to heal, to sanctify and adopt them into his family, and share his inheritance with them.*<sup>11</sup> ☐

<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 23:9-17

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 42:1-4,  
Isaiah 61:1-3

<sup>3</sup> Joel 2:28-32

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 3:13-17,  
Luke 3:21-22

<sup>5</sup> Mathew 4

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 2:8

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 15:26

<sup>8</sup> John 4

<sup>9</sup> Acts 1:4-5, 8

<sup>10</sup> Acts 2:1-13

<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 52:7-10

# Why would anyone want to be a Christian?

In several nations, it is illegal to become a Christian. But people become Christians anyway — despite penalties and even threats of death. Thousands of believers are killed each year, yet more people become Christians. Christianity can spread even when it is persecuted. That is the way Christianity started — Jesus was killed as a political criminal. In the first 200 years after his death, thousands of Christians were killed as the Roman Empire tried to exterminate this new faith.

Millions of people become Christians each year. Scientists, farmers, historians, and clerks — people from all walks of life — become Christians. Why? This article gives several reasons. You can see whether any of them make sense to you.

## 1. The teachings of Jesus

Christianity wouldn't make any sense without Jesus at its center. Jesus began his ministry as a teacher. He emphasized love, mercy, faith, forgiveness and honesty. He taught gentleness rather than violence, generosity rather than selfishness, doing good rather than evil. Jesus had respect for all people, even people others looked down on. Jesus touched lepers, welcomed children, and treated women and foreigners with respect.

But Jesus said some harsh things about religious leaders. He hated hypocrisy and the attitude of looking down on others. Jesus spent time with the “sinners” that the leaders despised. He was tolerant. He spent time with the tax collectors that many people hated. Prostitutes found forgiveness, not condemnation.

Jesus kept on teaching even when he knew the religious leaders were trying to kill him. He was sincere, and it cost him his life. People worldwide respect Jesus for his teachings. Many have tried to apply these teachings in their own lives. They have become followers of Jesus.

But sometimes the people who like Jesus' teachings are surprised to learn what he really taught. He said he had a unique relationship with God and that no one could get to God except through him. “No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”<sup>1</sup> Some people accept this; others do not.

## 2. The resurrection of Jesus

Roman soldiers crucified thousands of people, but only one of them has a following today. Why? Perhaps because only one of them is alive today. The resurrection of Jesus was the main message of the early church, according to the book of Acts. This is what the early disciples testified about and preached about. “God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.”<sup>2</sup> With this simple message, Christianity grew rapidly. Paul said there were hundreds of people who had seen Jesus alive.<sup>3</sup> The early apostles risked their lives to tell what they believed, and thousands were convinced.

By  
Dr Michael  
Morrison

No other explanation makes sense. If Jesus' body had remained in the tomb, the religious leaders would have used it to stop the message. Nor would it make any sense for the disciples to steal the body, then risk their lives for the next 30 years preaching that he was alive, without any of them ever betraying the secret. Ordinary fishermen do not risk their lives to preach something they know to be false. Nor does it make sense that the disciples had hallucinations. Dozens of people do not have identical dreams, all substantiated by an empty tomb. The disciples were not deceived, nor were they deceivers. They preached that Jesus had been raised from the dead and had gone into heaven to be at the right hand of God.

On this testimony, preached by ordinary people with an extraordinary boldness, thousands more believed. Even by first-century standards, it was a strange story, but they accepted it. If God raised this man from the dead, then God must have approved of what he taught — even his claims to be our route to salvation.

## 3. The death of Jesus

If Jesus was such a good man, if God really approved his teachings, why did God allow him to die? What was the purpose of his hideous death? Early Christians were not long in trying to explain the purpose of his death, and more people found reason to believe the story.

It started with Jesus himself, who taught that he “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”<sup>4</sup> Jesus said he was giving his life for a reason. His death had a purpose — it was to serve other people, to pay a price to rescue them. The disciples said that Jesus “died for our sins” — he died so that our sins, the things we have done wrong, would be forgiven. First-century Jews and Greeks were used to thinking about religion in terms of sacrifices. Jesus was a sacrifice, a payment of some kind, dying on behalf of other people to rescue them.

Scholars debate the reasons why Jesus had to die so others could be forgiven. But the bottom line is that he did it. He willingly gave his life to save us. It shows his great love for us — “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”<sup>5</sup>

For some people, this makes tremendous sense. Evil is serious, and it cannot be waived aside as if it did not matter. It matters a great deal, and the death of Jesus shows that it does. A huge cost was involved in paying for the consequences of sin. Jesus' death shows not only the seriousness of



sin, but also the depth of God’s love for us. Because of Jesus’ death, people believe that God loves them.

#### 4. The disciples of Jesus

One reason that Christianity spread so quickly is the believers. They set an example of sincerity, faith, love and mercy. They were letting Christ live in them. They, like their Master, were willing to give their lives to serve others. They changed their ways from selfishness to helpfulness, from violence to peace, from greed to generosity. It was an astonishing transformation, and their friends wondered why they no longer lived in debauchery, lust and drunkenness.<sup>6</sup> These Christians had a change of life that spoke well of Jesus Christ. Some people were convinced of the truth of Christianity simply by seeing the results in their lives.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, the example set by Christians today is a reason some people do not believe! The church is supposedly full of hypocrites. There is some truth in this objection. The church does have people who are less than Christ-like in their attitudes and behavior. But the church is exactly where such people need to be! The church is not a showcase for perfect people — it is a hospital for sinners. People with flaws are invited in, so it should be no surprise that problems are inside it. Sinners need to be in church to hear the message of forgiveness, to hear the teachings of Jesus, and to be exhorted to be more like Jesus.

There are some hypocrites in the church. Some people like the social advantages of the church, but do not follow Jesus. But there are also people remarkably changed by Christ. Former prostitutes, former alcoholics, former white-collar criminals, and even former hypocrites give their testimony that Jesus has changed them. This evidence convinces some people believe that Christianity is true.

#### 5. Good and evil

Some people reject God because there is evil in the world. “If God is all good, loving, and powerful, then he would eliminate evil.” But they do not consider the possibility that this is what God is actually in the process of doing. Selfishness is evil, and love is good. God has demonstrated his love by sending Jesus to rescue us from our selfishness. Jesus shows us that love triumphs over evil—evil does not have the last word in his life or in ours. Evil is not eliminated yet, but it will be.

The concept of “evil” requires that there be a God to

define what “good” is. Atheism cannot define good—it even implies that aggression is just as good as kindness, as long as it helps the species survive. But is it good for the species to survive? Atheism cannot say. Good and evil become matters of opinion, and that changes from time to time. There have been times in history when most people in a particular culture thought that slavery was good, or genocide was good. If we are to label anything as evil, we need a standard that transcends public opinion. Many believe that this standard is given to us most clearly in the Christian faith.

#### 6. The return of Christ

This life, with all its pains and problems, is not all there is. There will come a time when injustices will be set right, and goodness will be rewarded. The apostle Paul, preaching to philosophers in Athens, ended his speech with this claim: “God commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him

from the dead.”<sup>8</sup> Only a person who has been through death and come out the other side can credibly claim to give eternal life.

There will come a day of judgment, a day on which everyone will be called into account in front of the Judge who died for us. How can we stand before him? Not through our own wisdom, strength or goodness. We can stand only through the mercy of Jesus Christ, the only

way of salvation. The Judge loved us so much that he gave his life to save us.

Christianity teaches the good news that eternal life is given through faith in Christ. We can live forever with God in great joy and peace! There is tremendous purpose in our lives, purpose in our experiences, even in our pains and sorrows. Just as Jesus was raised from the dead, we will be, too, if we believe in him. If this life is all there is, it has no lasting value. But if eternity is possible, it is worth everything in the world. In Christianity, there is everything to gain, and nothing to lose. Some people choose to believe.□



<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:27

<sup>2</sup> Acts 2:32

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:6

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 20:28

<sup>5</sup> Romans 5:8

<sup>6</sup> 1 Peter 4:3-4

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 3:1

<sup>8</sup> Acts 17:30-31

# The Story of Job: Now do you see?

**W**e all know the story of Job. Everyone agrees that it's a horrific story, but is there more to the story than just a sad tale? Indeed, there is.

Job was considered wealthy and blessed. He had 11,000 head of sheep, camels, oxen, donkeys; he had servants and a huge family whom he loved very much. Even though he was not an Israelite, Job obeyed God, and was thankful to God for his many blessings. God considered Job righteous and blameless. Then, in Job 1:6-12 we read:

One day when the angels came to report to GOD, Satan, who was the Designated Accuser, came along with them. GOD singled out Satan and said, "What have you been up to?"

Satan answered GOD, "Going here and there, checking things out on earth."

GOD said to Satan, "Have you noticed my friend Job? There's no one quite like him—honest and true to his word, totally devoted to God and hating evil."

Satan retorted, "So do you think Job does all that out of the sheer goodness of his heart? Why, no one ever had it so good! You pamper him like a pet, make sure nothing bad ever happens to him or his family or his possessions, bless everything he does—he can't lose!"

"But what do you think would happen if you reached down and took away everything that is his? He'd curse you right to your face, that's what."

GOD replied, "We'll see. Go ahead—do what you want with all that is his. Just don't hurt *him*."

Let's take a moment to read between the lines: This conversation seems to be pretty laid back, like it's between farmers who happen to meet at the Feed & Seed Store and they're leaning against a pickup truck discussing local politics. When Satan enters, no one reacts like a vicious criminal has just escaped prison. This comes across as a casual, friendly meeting. But the fact that God has renamed Lucifer, which means "morning star," with the name Satan, which means "enemy," would say otherwise.

These verses reveal that Satan is being restrained or held back. God is in control, not Satan. We get the impression, though, that Satan may have felt like he'd just manipulated God. But no one pulls anything over on God. Satan can only do what God allows him to do and no more.

And so, this began the trials of Job from the land of Uz. His donkeys and oxen were stolen by the Sabeans and his field hands were killed. Lightning killed the sheep and shepherds. The Chaldeans stole his camels and killed his camel drivers. And the worst, Job's ten children and all who were with them were killed by a tornado!

But not once did Job curse God.

And then in Job 2:1-10 we read:

By  
Sondra Peters

One day when the angels came to report to GOD, Satan also showed up. GOD singled out Satan, saying, "And what have you been up to?" Satan answered GOD, "Oh, going here and there, checking things out." Then GOD said to Satan, "Have you noticed my friend Job? There's no one quite like him, is there—honest and true to his word, totally devoted to God and hating evil? He still has a firm grip on his integrity! You tried to trick me into destroying him, but it didn't work."

Satan answered, "A human would do anything to save his life. But what do you think would happen if you reached down and took away his health? He'd curse you to your face, that's what."

GOD said, "All right. Go ahead—you can do what you like with him. But mind you, don't kill him."

[Now, this might seem that Job is nothing more than a diversion or entertainment to God or a pawn in a rivalry between God and Satan. Nothing could be further from the truth. There is purpose in trials.]

Satan left GOD and struck Job with terrible sores. Job was ulcers and scabs from head to foot. They itched and oozed so badly that he took a piece of broken pottery to scrape himself, then went and sat on a trash heap, among the ashes.

His wife said, "Still holding on to your precious integrity, are you? Curse God and be done with it!"

He told her, "You're talking like an empty-headed fool. We take the good days from God—why not also the bad days?"

Not once through all this did Job sin. He said nothing against God.

Enter from stage left the three "friends" who try to comfort Job. At first, they quietly keep him company. Then after he's broken the silence, they say, "Well, the innocent don't suffer like you have. You must be guilty of something!" They are about as helpful as Job's wife was!

But remember, God said Job was blameless or righteous because of his faith!

For the next 36 chapters the three friends go back and forth with Job: The friends accusing Job, Job saying, "But I'm innocent!" Job is confused because he's done everything God has asked of him! Job tells God, this isn't the way things work, or should work, in this world—it isn't fair! He never questions God's existence or God as his advocate. He insists, "I know that my Redeemer lives." But Job does say, "I cry out to you, O God, but you do not answer." He just wants his chance to plead his case.

Then finally God speaks up. "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2). Who is ignorantly accusing me of doing wrong? God doesn't answer Job's, "Why is this happening?" God

says in verse 3, "Brace yourself like a man, Job, because I have some questions for you." For the next four chapters (Job 38-41), God rebukes Job like nobody's business! God asks in 38:4, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" Did you tell the oceans' waves (verses 8-11) that you can come this far, but no further? Did you cause the sun to rise in the east? Have you tamed a leviathan (chapter 41)? If so, you won't ever forget that battle! If we didn't know before that God did sarcasm, we do when He tells Job in 38:21, "But of course you know all this! For you were born before it was all created, and you are so very experienced!" Ouch!

Then Job, humbled, responds meekly in Job 42:3, 5, "You're right, God, ". . . I was talking about things I knew nothing about . . . I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes."

This is not talking about physical sight, because Job only heard God's voice in a whirlwind. Job meant that he finally understood, as in "Oh-h-h-h! Now I see!" What did he see? He "saw" that God is in control.

God was not angry with Job. In the article "The Trial of Job" Paul Kroll writes, "God does not condemn Job for railing against Him and accusing Him. God only corrects Job's misconception about His ability to rule the creation. . . . But God does not accuse Job of sin. God neither calls him self-righteous nor a blasphemer."

<sup>1</sup>God still thinks highly of Job and it's obvious in the next verses when He turns his attention to one of the three friends:

" . . . I am angry with you and your two friends, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has. . . . My servant Job will pray for you, and I will accept his prayer on your behalf. I will not treat you as you deserve, for you have not spoken accurately about me, as my servant Job has." (Job 42:7-8)

[If you want to know the rest of the story of Job, read Job 42:10-17.]

As Phillip Yancey writes in his book *Disappointment with God*, "One bold message in the Book of Job is that you can say anything to God. Throw at him your grief, your anger, your doubt, your bitterness, your betrayal, your disappointment — he can absorb them all." <sup>2</sup>God is much bigger than we are.

We don't know how much Job understood about the Gospel. In the New Testament, the apostles didn't really understand God's plan of forgiveness, repentance, salvation and eternal life until Jesus died. So, Job, who lived centuries before Jesus, may not have understood

God's plan either. But what he did see, or understand, is that God is in control.

### Do you see?

The real purpose of Job's suffering is the testing of his faith and love. We know that God loves us unconditionally, but does he know that about you? Job proved by his actions and words that he had strong faith and that he loved God unconditionally. Why does God need to test your faith? That's for another article, but think on it. Why does He need to know how strong your faith and love are before He gives you eternal life?

God has you in the palms of his hands. He has a plan. All of mankind is a part of that plan.

### Do you see?

I'm going to take a wild guess that you have a worry? Does that worry involve your country's state of affairs? The world's state of affairs? How about fires, floods, tsunamis, earthquakes or sickness? Does that worry involve someone you love, who, perhaps, does not yet know God? Let's look at these scriptures:

"Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him." (Psalms 37:7)

"Be still, and know that I am God [I got this]." (Psalm 46:10)

Right about now, you might be saying, "If God is in control, why is He allowing the horrible things to happen around the world? What kind of God allows that?!" The kind of God who has a plan and that plan is for all of mankind to be saved. God is all about the



end result.

"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, *not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:8-9).


### Do you see? God is in control

At times, everything may seem to be falling apart and spinning out of control. God is fully aware of your fears, worries, crises. He's got this!

A difficult thing that someone is going through, may just be the thing, or a part in a series of things, that will make that person receptive to God when He draws that person to him.

<sup>1</sup>Kroll, Paul (1991). "The Trial of Job". <https://www.gci.org/articles/the-trial-of-job/>.

<sup>2</sup>Yancey, Philip. *Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988; ePub Edition, September 2015) □



# God holds our tears in a bottle

Since my husband's death, I find that mornings are the worst part of my day.

It's the mornings when my two minds are the most separated. The one that is in extreme pain and the other that is holding on to the knowledge of a God – my God taking care of me.

It's the mornings, after a small reprieve from the pain, that reality has it's way with me again – like a bully in a back ally lying in wait to beat me up with the memories of my now shattered life.

It's the mornings that reduce me to "mourning". Mornings are when I am the most pensive - thoughts flow with the most ease. My heart seems the most vulnerable not only to the pain but also to the day's demands that I move through it, no matter how clumsy or unwilling I may feel. Sometimes I weep. But sometimes I simply give full voice to the cry of my heart. It was on one of those mornings, as I cried out to God for relief, that I was reminded of the scripture that God holds my tears in a bottle. "You have kept record of my days of wandering. You have stored my tears in your bottle and counted each one of them." (Psalm 56:8)

For a moment I mused on it. I had thought about that scripture many times before and had only been mildly encouraged by it. After all, I would think, "Isn't that a "nice" thing for God to do with my tears?" I am personally much more encouraged by the scripture in Revelation that says one day He will wipe them all away. That's the promise I was yearning for. And that was what I really needed.

However, the pain on this morning was so inconsolable,

By  
Trish Clauson

I was drowning in it. I was barely able to come up for air. As I cried, begging God for something to relieve it, I felt Him ask me this question... "Have you ever wondered why I would hold your tears in a bottle?"

"No" I thought to myself. . ."I hadn't."

Then immediately this thought followed:

*"I hold your tears in a bottle because they are so very precious to Me. It is in your tears that you display My Heart for the brokenness of this world, for the pain that sin has borne down on my children so unrelentingly. Your tears bring you closer to my heart than anything else you will ever do or feel. I hold them as evidence of My love in your heart for the struggles of this world... the one I created – the one I love."*

I stopped crying. I have always hated my tears. But here God was telling me that they were precious to Him. And everything I was "hearing" felt right because it connected to Who I was learning God to be. I knew this had to be true, yet I was sorely taken aback. Something I have hated so much throughout my life, was something God held with supreme regard.

I know that God has never taken pleasure in our pain. But I suppose like many, I too have wondered why we as humans have to endure so much of it, when God "could" possibly relieve more of it. On the other hand, I also know that when He decided to give us free will He also gave us the right to do things that would cause pain.

Several months before, when I was feeling particularly abandoned by God in the midst of Arnold's illness, I again felt God's comforting words to me: "When I chose

# Building relationships

## With people and with the Lord

We all want to develop and maintain pleasant relationships with friends, neighbors, co-workers and family. As Christians we desire a solid relationship with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. How can we know when we have good relationships and how may we strengthen them?

Several years ago I heard a psychologist explain the basic qualities of what constitutes a relationship. He simply said, "If you know a person, like the person, and trust the person, you have a relationship." Clear enough! His explanation gave me confidence that I did have good relationships with some friends, and did indeed have a relationship with the Lord. But his brief statement also showed me there was room to develop and improve those relationships.

Let's look more closely at these three qualities.

### Knowing

Obviously we need to learn something about others in order to relate to them in meaningful ways. We come to know people by being with them and doing things together.

Two-way conversation is the key to getting to know others. This does not mean talking all the time. But it is important to share our concerns and feelings. We bring our concerns to the Lord when we pray. We welcome his communication to us through Bible study. In fact, he invites us to learn about him.<sup>1</sup> When we read of his actions, his words, his loving character and how he lived, we come to know him.

We can also learn of him by spending time with other Christians, attending church services and Bible studies. As we do so we should, like the Bereans, examine the Scriptures to see if what we hear accurately conforms to Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

"Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long."<sup>3</sup>



By  
Paul Hailey

<sup>1</sup> Matthew 11:29

<sup>2</sup> Acts 17:11

<sup>3</sup> Psalm 25:4, 5

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:19

<sup>5</sup> Proverbs 3:6

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 9:10

<sup>7</sup> 1 Peter 1:18

### Liking

Most of us relate better to certain types of people than to others. I'm most comfortable with other introverts—people who enjoy thoughtful one-on-one discussions. I don't relate well to some other types of people no matter how hard I try. Thankfully we don't have to connect well with everyone. Even so, we can show love and kindness to those we don't naturally relate to.

When we learn of the Lord, however, and comprehend his love for us and all that he has done and is doing for us, we can't help but like him—a liking that will develop into love. "We love (him) because he first loved us."<sup>4</sup>

### Trusting

Building trust with people takes time. But it is important to do so. We want relationships with those who are reliable, who do what they say they are going to do, and who are honest.

After we come to know our Lord and experience his blessings and fulfilled promises in our lives, we learn to totally trust him. The result is peaceful confidence that he has our best interests in mind and will guide our lives in the direction that is best for us.<sup>5</sup>

"Those who know your name will trust in you, for you, Lord, have never forsaken those who seek you."<sup>6</sup>

### The joy of having solid relationships

Once we develop meaningful relationships with others, we will delight in doing things together. Every week I go hiking with a close friend. We enjoy fresh air, seeing wild animals, beautiful scenery, and discussing our mutual concerns.

Likewise, when we have a relationship with the Lord, we feel his comforting presence, we become confident in his grace and promise of salvation, and will be motivated to join him in the opportunity of spreading the gospel and serving our fellow man.

When we come to know him, love him, and trust him, it brings us joy—as Peter put it, "an inexpressible and glorious joy."<sup>7</sup> □

Continued from page 20

to give you free will I bound myself to your pain." Then as now, I immediately felt I understood His meaning, especially with regard to my own children. I knew the more freedom I gave them, the more I was going to hurt when they made mistakes. The only way I could ever stop their pain and mine was to prevent them from having the right to choose and make decisions for themselves. I really wouldn't want to do that...and neither does God.

As a result of God choosing to bind Himself to our pain, He also chose to take it into Himself, not only on the Cross, but through every single day and in each of our lives. When we shed tears as a result of pain... whether it is from the losses we face or from the

consequences of sin, those tears draw us closer to the heart of Who God is and allows us to see the world through His compassionate eyes. Unfortunately, when we are in pain, we often miss that. Pain distorts our thinking and causes us to feel only frustrated with God for seeming so aloof as to allow us to go through it in the first place.

So once again I am in two minds. The one that is hurting so much I can't move, and the other that is getting a glimpse into God's mind and seeing how much my pain is connecting my heart to His. Only when the pain of loss and of sin can be fully eradicated will there not only be no more tears...there will also be no more reason for them. □

# What Sort of Human Nature Did Jesus Have?

The doctrine of the Incarnation declares that the eternal Son of God, in adding humanity to his divinity, became Jesus Christ—one person with two natures, fully God and fully human. Reflecting on that truth, many ask, what sort of human nature did Jesus have? Some say it was the one possessed by Adam and Eve before the fall. Others say it was human nature corrupted by the fall.

While we may not consider this issue to be a core doctrine, it does teach that our salvation as humans is directly and fundamentally related to Jesus being human on our behalf in every respect. By uniting human nature with his perfect divine nature, the Son of God brought to humanity the regeneration and healing we so desperately need yet are unable to achieve for ourselves. This means that Jesus not only took upon himself our sinful external condition but also our human nature, corrupted by the fall. This understanding clarifies the doctrine of the Incarnation and points to the profound depths of Christ's atoning work on our behalf.

Theologian Gregory Nazianzen (AD 329-390) of the early church in the East taught that the Son of God assumed our corrupt human nature. He wrote, *"For that which he has not assumed he has not healed; but that which is united to his Godhead is also saved. If only half of Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of him who was begotten, and so be saved as a whole."*

Gregory's assertion that the unassumed is the unredeemed had been put forward earlier by Irenaeus. The church taught that in the Incarnation, the holy Son of God assumed from the Virgin Mary our fallen human nature, with all its weaknesses, sin and guilt, yet in such a way that instead of sinning himself he brought the judgment of God to bear upon us in the depths of our human nature, redeeming, healing and sanctifying at the same time what he took from us, through his atoning birth, life, death and resurrection.

Thomas F. Torrance is one of several Trinitarian theologians in our day who, following Irenaeus, Gregory, Athanasius and other theologians of the ancient Eastern church, teach that the Son of God assumed corrupt human nature—what the apostle Paul calls our flesh:

*"For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."* (Romans 8:3-4)

Torrance asserted that there is no reason to hold back from affirming that Jesus, during his earthly life, bore what he called "defiled" or "depraved" human nature—the nature that so desperately needs Christ's atoning and redeeming work in order for it to be healed and converted back to God. Torrance explains:

*"Through his incarnation, the Son of God has made himself one with us as we are, and indeed made himself what we are, thereby not only making our nature his own but taking on himself our lost condition subject*

By  
Ted Johnson

to condemnation and death, all in order that he might substitute himself in our place, discharge our debt, and offer himself in atoning sacrifice to God on our behalf. Since sin and its judgment have affected the actual nature of death as we experience it, Christ has made our death and fate his own, thereby taking on himself the penalty due to all in death, destroying the power of sin and its stronghold in death, and thus redeeming or rescuing us from its dominion."

There can be no doubt that the New Testament speaks of the flesh of Jesus as the concrete form of our human nature marked by Adam's fall, the human nature which seen from the cross is at enmity with God and needs to be reconciled to God. In becoming flesh the Word penetrated into hostile territory, into our human alienation and estrangement with God...

Now when we listen to the witness of Holy Scripture... we know we are faced with something we can never fully understand, but it is something that we must seek to understand as far as we can. One thing should be abundantly clear, that if Jesus Christ did not assume our fallen flesh, our fallen humanity, then our fallen humanity is untouched by his work—for "the unassumed is the unredeemed," as Gregory Nazianzen put it. Patristic theology, especially as we see it expounded in the great Athanasius, makes a great deal of the fact that he who knew no sin became sin for us (2 Corinthians 5:21), exchanging his riches for our poverty (2 Corinthians 8:9), his perfection for our imperfection, his incorruption for our corruption, his eternal life for our mortality (1 Corinthians 15:53). Thus Christ took from Mary a corruptible and mortal body in order that he might take our sin, judge and condemn it in the flesh, and so assume our human nature as we have it in the fallen world that he might heal, sanctify and redeem it. In that teaching the Greek fathers were closely following the New Testament. If the Word of God did not actually come where we are, and join himself to us and range himself with us where we are in sin and under judgement, how could it be said that Christ really took our place, took our cause upon himself in order to redeem us? What could we then have to do with him? We stand before God as flesh of sin under God's judgement, and it is into this concrete form of our sin-laden, corruptible and mortal humanity in which we are damned and lost that Christ came, without ceasing to be the holy Son of God. He entered into complete solidarity with us in our sinful existence in order to save us, without becoming himself a sinner.

Not all theologians (ancient and contemporary) agree with this understanding that the Son of God assumed corrupt human nature. In fact, most theologians after the 5th century in the West took a different view. Torrance explains why:

*"Western divergence from the eastern Church can be traced back to Pope Leo rejecting the eastern teaching that in the Incarnation the Son of God took our depraved human nature upon himself... [Leo] held instead that it was not our fallen Adamic nature but some neutral human nature in Christ that became the instrument for his saving work for mankind. The theological consequences of that position were immense, as we can see in the typical approach of Latin theology to the*

idea of original sin as in the teaching of St. Augustine, in its formulation of a doctrine of atonement, largely in terms of external juridical relations, and... in the Roman [Catholic] dogmas of "the immaculate conception" and the "assumption of Mary..." Failure to recognize that the human mind, far from being neutral, is actually estranged and twisted, and thus in need of internal healing, opened the door to a pre-Christian Greek rationalism that has affected not only western theology but all western culture."

Most contemporary objections to the teaching of the Eastern church on this topic arise out of presuming that the assumption of our human fallen condition would necessarily cause Jesus to sin, thus making him a sinner like we are. But that logic is based on an unwarranted inference—one that is not necessarily true. We understand from Holy Scripture that Jesus, in the midst of his incarnate life, never ceased having a divine nature. Jesus' human nature never existed apart from his divine nature—at all times he remained one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. That relationship makes all the difference as to why Jesus, the eternal Son of God, never sinned as we do. The author of Hebrews repudiates any false inferences to the contrary by asserting that Jesus was indeed "like us in every respect," being "tempted... as we are," yet "without sin" (Hebrews 2:17; 4:15). Though the Son of God assumed our fallen human nature, rather than being tarnished by it, it was sanctified by his touch. Torrance put it this way:

[Christ's assumption] of our flesh of sin was a sinless action, which means that Jesus does not do in the flesh of sin what we do, namely, sin, but it also means that by remaining holy and sinless in our flesh, he condemned sin in the flesh he assumed and judged it by his very sinlessness.

This understanding is consistent with the biblical teaching that Jesus' life was one of sanctifying himself (John 17:19). There would have been no need or even possibility of this being the case if Jesus had an unfallen (uncorrupt) human nature. We also note in Scripture that Jesus learned obedience, even though he was the perfect Son of God (Hebrews 5:8). The human nature our Lord assumed was regenerated (remade or reborn) in Jesus by means of all that he went through during his life on earth, culminating in his crucifixion and ascension. Then, what Jesus achieved in his divine-human person is shared, by the indwelling Holy Spirit, with all who put their trust in Jesus as their Lord and Saviour (Titus 3:5-6). This is why the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:30 that Jesus, who is our life, is our "sanctification."

The good news is that the eternal Son of God, the Word, in becoming human via the Incarnation, assumed the human nature that is just like ours. In possessing that nature and resisting its downward pull at all points throughout his life, Jesus restored, renewed and so perfected that nature. Never succumbing to corrupt human nature, he never once sinned. Thus, there is no aspect of human existence, no depth of our fallen nature, that the redeeming work of Jesus has not touched and thus healed. Torrance comments:

From his birth to his death and resurrection on our behalf [Jesus] sanctified what he assumed through his own self-consecration as incarnate Son to the Father, and in sanctifying it brought the divine judgment to

**Charles Spurgeon:**

It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness.

God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.

I would go to the deeps a hundred times to cheer a downcast spirit. It is good for me to have been afflicted, that I might know how to speak a word in season to one that is weary.

Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years.

The way to do a great deal is to keep on doing a little. The way to do nothing at all is to be continually resolving that you will do everything.

"No faith is so precious as that which lives and triumphs through adversity. Tested faith brings experience. You would never have believed your own weakness had you not needed to pass through trials. And you would never have known God's strength had His strength not been needed to carry you through."

"Anxiety does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, but only empties today of its strength."

"The doctrine of the atonement is to my mind one of the surest proofs of the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture. Who would or could have thought of the just Ruler dying for the unjust rebel? This is no teaching of human mythology, or dream of poetical imagination. This method of expiation is only known among men because it is a fact; fiction could not have devised it. God himself ordained it; it is not a matter which could have been imagined."

bear directly upon our human nature both in the holy life he lived and in the holy death he died in atoning and reconciling sacrifice before God. That was a vicarious activity which was brought to its triumphant fulfilment and which received the verdict of the Father's complete approval in the resurrection of Jesus as God's beloved Son from the dead and in the rebirth of humanity in him.

Through what Jesus did throughout his life on earth, bearing all the while our corrupt human nature, a reconciling exchange took place, as noted by the apostle Paul:

For our sake he [God] made him [Jesus] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

The eternal Son took upon himself our corrupt (fallen) nature and purified and healed it through his life of perfect obedience to the Father. According to Torrance, the work of atoning salvation does not take place outside of Christ, as something external to him, but takes place within him, within the incarnate constitution of his Person, as Mediator.

Now in heaven, Jesus, who remains both fully God and fully (now glorified) human, shares his perfected humanity with us by the Holy Spirit. Though we continue to bear corrupt human nature, we are being conformed more and more to Jesus' perfected humanity until that glorious day when we will be granted, via glorification in the resurrection, the fullness of perfected humanity. It is by Jesus' vicarious (representative, substitutionary) humanity, united to his divinity, that we are justified, sanctified and glorified. *Hallelujah!* ☐

# The Plain Truth Magazine

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