

THE Plain Truth

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A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jan - Mar 2017

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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Holy Bible

PP 12578/03/2013 (032108)

A Prayer

Dear God, thank you for taking us through 2016 with all its ups and downs. As we enter 2017, we like to offer you this simple prayer.

Abba Father, thank you for revealing yourself to us in the most accurate and clearest way possible through your son Jesus and by your Spirit. Seeing (knowing) Jesus is seeing you. We can never know you in any other way even in a billion years.

Thank you for revealing our true identity, our true self in Christ, that we are your beloved children. Thank you for imaging us in your likeness and calling us your darling prince and princess. Thank you for adopting us into your very family, and for sharing everything with us.

Lord Jesus, thank you for delivering us from our spiritual blindness. Even when we went astray and were hurting, you didn't just watch us from afar, hoping our suffering would end. No, you put on humanity and entered our world of confusion, darkness and brokenness. You assumed our sinful nature and redeemed it. You restored your image in us that was lost in Adam. You took the initiative to reconcile us to God – forgiving us and giving us your righteousness, faith, peace, joy and freedom. You restored our glory, dignity and worth. You blessed us with every spiritual blessing.

Holy Spirit, thank you for opening our minds and granting us repentance and faith. Thank you for transforming us from the inside out. Thank you for the new body you will give us at our resurrection – a glorified body that is not subject to the limitations of time and space, aging, sickness and death. With this body, you want us to explore this earth and the vast universe with myriad galaxies, stars and moons. Not to mention the quantum world of atoms, molecules, quarks and waves. Thank you for this adventurous life you are awakening us to.

Thank you for your desire to change our hearts and minds, and for providing us a better way of living and being in this world in your son Jesus. Like Jesus, we too can resist conflicts, oppression, jealousy, hatred, selfishness, hypocrisy and foolishness. We live free in this world when we choose his way of always forgiving, and forever trusting. Living this way extinguishes rivalry and abolishes war. Thank you that in trusting you, we can overcome fear, doubt, anxiety, depression, loneliness, hopelessness and live the resurrection life here and now!

by
Dr. P. Sellappan

Thank you for not only making humanity your dwelling place, but also for treasuring us so much, you willingly collaborate with us, through us, in us and as us, in order to inspire, motivate, and draw us into the beauty of your unconditional love.

Thank you for humanity, for brothers and sisters all over this globe, each with their own unique personality, gifts, talents, and abilities. Lord, thank you that you *loved* the whole world so much you made us in your image and likeness, and then when we forgot who we really are, you gave us your son Jesus. *Love embodied* came as a reminder so that we might see and believe who we really are. Some of us are rejoicing and delighting in our awakening while others of us still struggle to see and believe, seeing your promises as mere fantasies, or pie in the sky dreams. Lord, I long for my brothers and sisters all over this earth, for all to awaken to the a love you have always had for each one of us, a love you proved once and for all 2000 years ago.

Lord, you have been so good to us that we don't even have the vocabulary to thank you for all that you have accomplished for us in Christ Jesus. Thank you for giving us your Spirit to help us express our heartfelt gratitude and thanksgiving to you.

Lord, you truly love us as you love yourself - fulfilling the very command you gave us, "Love your neighbour as yourself." You laid down your life for us so we could be included in your life. Thank you that you are *Immanuel*, God with us, and *that you would rather be God with us, than God without us*. Jesus is our proof - eternally existing as both God and man. In Jesus, you show us that you will always be with us and we

are always with you, brought into an eternal union of perfect love.

Please help us see what you see and believe what you believe about us. We live joyfully and wholeheartedly when we begin to see and agree with you about who we truly are, trusting that you know us better than we know ourselves. Thank you that as we awaken, and every time we return to this reality, the veil (blindfold) is removed, and we can see clearly who we really are. This is what helps us see and internalize your goodness and be fully persuaded of your lavish love for us.

Lord, *thank you* that you hear our prayers, and that you delight to answer them with a resounding yes and amen... In your dear name, we pray... Amen!?!☐



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What our readers say:

Ed: On behalf of the Plain Truth Team, we like to thank you for supporting this ministry through 2016 with your prayers, donations and participation. We trust you will extend the same support through 2017. We pray our loving Father, Son and Holy Spirit will continue to bless you and your family in every way through 2017.

I received your Plain Truth magazine in my work place. The message to love God was clear and beautiful. I am a Hindu and would like clarification on an issue. The concept of loving God is highlighted through daily devotional practices which incorporate good thoughts and conducts. This includes avoidance of meat diets, which involves killing of animals. We in Hinduism believe all life forms are sacred. The cow particularly is an important animal because it provides milk to people. I would be grateful if you could give your views from the Christian perspective. Thank you.

Thavaraja Sundhar

Ed: Christianity focuses primarily on our relationship with God and with one another. It is about living our new life in Christ to the fullest here and now and forever in God's kingdom. It doesn't really talk about food (and drinks). It gives believers freedom, but asks us not to judge one another. Eating doesn't make one less righteous; not eating doesn't make one more righteous. Romans 14:17 tells us: "For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." Hope this answers your question.

Year 2016 has been a painful year for many – unemployment, falling money value, rising cost of living, health, security and environmental issues, fractured relationships, uncertain future, and political, religious and racial tension. Can we hope for a better 2017 or will it be more of the same or even worse?

Jayashree Petaling jaya

Ed: I don't believe in crystal-ball gazing to predict what is in store for 2017. While we hope for a better year it all depends on how we perceive God, ourselves, and the creation. If we see what God sees, we will naturally be motivated to act in Godly ways that produce peace, joy, happiness and fulfilment. But if we don't see what God sees, we will naturally be motivated by our own selfish desires that lead to all sorts of problems – to ourselves, others, and the environment. When we love people and use things to benefit them, we can expect good things to happen. But when love things and use people, we can expect bad outcomes. So it all depends on our individual and collective response to God's

command, "Love your neighbour as yourself."

The Plain Truth guides me in my daily walk and gives me peace and strength to face the unknown future. Enclosed is a small token. Keep up the good work. Thank you.

Amarjit Kaur Petaling Jaya

The Plain Truth helps me to understand God's word better. I also enjoy the various topics as they are usually intriguing and thought-provoking.

Samuel Oh Singapore

Each copy of The Plain Truth is read by two families of four members each. We are an emotional lot and many of your articles had made us cry. Thank you.

Royston Leow Singapore

Some of your articles are very informative. I have been seeking for these types of articles and I have found them in The Plain Truth magazine. I have always shared my experiences with friends.

Phang Wien Ho Singapore

Congratulations. This is the only reading material I read for peace and tranquillity. Every single word is read and pondered over leisurely. As a token of appreciation, I would like to donate towards the cost of yearly subscription plus the cost for another reader.

Anonymous

I have transferred RM50 as donation to Plain Truth ministry. Many thanks for your excellent magazine.

Rita Lie

I just banked into the Plain Truth account RM200 to support your great ministry. Thank you for the lovely magazine.

Tan

Ed: Thank you all for your generous contribution to this ministry. Your donation is surely helping us to share the Good News with many others.

The Plain Truth is easy to read and understand. It has strengthened my faith. I like to thank all the staff for being so generous in giving it free. The Lord has blessed me through this magazine. It is a wonderful thing to share the Gospel. Continue the good work and may God bless your ministry. Once again, thank you.

Ruth Fredrick Arokiam Ipoh

The Plain Truth is a fantastic publication that I would never want to miss it.

Ng Sin Kwee Singapore

I am very impressed with the magazine which I used to read from my friend's copy. I wish to have these copies for myself too. Please send the magazine to me. The topics discussed are relevant to day-to-day life and it strengthens my faith.

Mary Vincent Taiping

The articles give me new perspectives about life and help me to grow in my bible knowledge. I appreciate the entire team for their dedication and hard work.

Rajagopal Doraisamy Teluk Intan

It is a magazine of Christian understanding. We are confused and find it hard to understand why there is so much suffering in this world. The articles explain in great detail why this is so, and in the process, we learn of God's great love for us, his children.

Boey Chee Ho Penang

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The Three-Fold Meaning of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a reminder of what Jesus did in the past, a symbol of our present relationship with him, and a promise of what he will do in the future. Let's survey these three aspects.

Memorials of Jesus' death on the cross

On the evening he was betrayed, while Jesus was eating a meal with his disciples, he took some bread and said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."¹ When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we each eat a small piece of bread in remembrance of Jesus.

"In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'" When we drink a small amount of wine (or grape juice) at the Lord's Supper, we remember that Jesus' blood was shed for us, and that his blood inaugurated the new covenant. Just as the old covenant was sealed by the sprinkling of blood, the new covenant was established by Jesus' blood.²

Paul said, "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."³ The Lord's Supper looks back to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Is Jesus' death a good thing, or a bad thing? There are some very sorrowful aspects to his death, but the bigger picture is that his death is wonderful news for all of us. Jesus is glad that he did it. It shows how much God loves us—so much that he sent his Son to die for us, so that our sins would be forgiven and we may live forever with him.

The death of Jesus is a tremendous gift to us. It is precious. When we are given a gift of great value, a gift that involved personal sacrifice for us, how should we receive it? With mourning and regret at the sacrifice? No, that is not what the giver wants. Rather, we should receive it with great gratitude, as an expression of great love. If we have tears, they should be tears of joy.

So the Lord's Supper, although a memorial of a death, is not a funeral, as if Jesus were still dead. Rather, we observe this memorial knowing that death held Jesus only three days—knowing that death will not hold us forever, either. We rejoice that Jesus has conquered death, and has set free all who were enslaved by a fear of death. We can remember Jesus' death with the happy knowledge that he has triumphed over sin and death!⁴ As Jesus predicted, our mourning has turned into joy.⁵ Coming to the Lord's table and having communion should be a celebration, not a funeral.

The ancient Israelites looked back to the Passover events as the defining moment in their history, when their identity as a nation began. That was when they escaped death and slavery through the intervention of God and they were freed to serve the Lord. In the church, we look back to the events surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus as the defining moment in our history. That is how we escape death



by
Dr. Joseph
Tkach

and the slavery of sin, and that is how we are freed to serve the Lord. The Lord's Supper is a memorial of this defining moment in our history.

Our present relationship with Jesus Christ

The crucifixion of Jesus has a continuing significance to all who have taken up a cross to follow him. We continue to participate in his death and in the new covenant because we participate in his life. Paul wrote, "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ?"



⁶ And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" In the Lord's Supper, we show that we share in Jesus Christ. We commune with him. We are united in him.

The New Testament speaks of our sharing with Jesus in several ways. We share in his crucifixion,⁷ death,⁸ resurrection⁹ and life.¹⁰ Our lives are in him, and he is in us. The Lord's Supper pictures this spiritual reality.

John 6 conveys a similar idea. After Jesus proclaimed himself to be the "bread of life," he said, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." Our spiritual food is in Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper pictures this ongoing truth. "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him." We show that we live in Christ, and he lives in us.

So the Lord's Supper helps us look upward, to Christ, and be mindful that true life can only be in him and with him. When we are aware that Jesus lives in us, we also pause to think what kind of home we are giving him. Before he came into our lives, we were habitations of sin. Jesus knew that before he even knocked on the door of our lives. He wants to get in so he can start cleaning things up. But when Jesus knocks, many people try to do a quick tidy-up before they open the door. However, we are humanly unable to cleanse our sins—the most we can do is hide them in the closet.

So we hide our sins in the closet, and invite Jesus into the living room. Eventually we let him into the kitchen, and then the hallway, and then a bedroom. It is a gradual process. Eventually Jesus gets to the closet where our worst sins are hidden, and he cleans them, too. Year by year, as we grow in spiritual maturity, we surrender more of our lives to our Savior. We let him live in us.

It is a process, and the Lord's Supper plays a role in this process. Paul wrote, "Everyone should take a careful look at themselves before they eat the bread and drink from the cup."¹¹ Every time we participate, we should be mindful of the great meaning involved in this ceremony. When we examine ourselves, we often find sin. This is normal—it is not a reason to avoid the Lord's Supper. It is a reminder that we need Jesus in our lives. Only he can take our sins away.

Paul criticized the Corinthian Christians for their manner of observing the Lord's Supper. The wealthy members were coming first, eating a great meal and getting drunk. The poor members came last, still hungry. The wealthy were not sharing with the poor. They were not really sharing in the life of Christ, for they were not doing what he would do. They did not understand what it means to be members of the body of Christ, and that members have responsibilities toward one another.

As we examine ourselves, we need to look around to see whether we are treating one another in the way that Jesus commanded. If you are united with Christ and I am united to Christ, then we are united to each other. So the Lord's Supper, by picturing our participation in Christ, also pictures our participation (other translations may say communion or sharing or fellowship) with each other. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:17, "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf." By participating together in

the Lord's Supper, we picture the fact that we are one body in Christ, one with each other, with responsibilities toward one another.

At Jesus' last meal with his disciples, Jesus pictured the life of God's kingdom by washing the feet of his disciples.¹² When Peter protested, Jesus said it was necessary that he wash his feet. The Christian life involves both serving and being served.

Reminds us of Jesus' return

Jesus said he would not drink the fruit of the vine again until he came in the fullness of the kingdom.¹³ Whenever we participate, we are reminded of Jesus' promise. There will be a great messianic "banquet," a "wedding supper" of celebration. The bread and wine are miniature rehearsals of what will be the greatest victory celebration in all history. Paul wrote that "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*."¹⁴ We know that he will come again.

The Lord's Supper is rich in meaning. That is why it has been a prominent part of the Christian tradition throughout the centuries. Sometimes it has been allowed to become a lifeless ritual, done more out of habit than with meaning. When a ritual loses meaning, some people overreact by stopping the ritual entirely. The better response is to restore the meaning. That's why it is helpful for us to review the meaning of our custom. □

¹ Luke 22:19

² Hebrews 9:18-28

³ 1 Corinthians 11:26

⁴ Hebrews 2:14-15

⁵ John 16:20

⁶ 1 Corinthians 10:16

⁷ Galatians 2:20;
Colossians 2:20

⁸ Romans 6:4

⁹ Ephesians 2:6;
Colossians 2:13; 3:1

¹⁰ Hebrews 2:14-15

¹⁰ Galatians 2:20

¹¹ 1 Corinthians
11:28

¹² John 13:1-15

¹³ Matthew 26:29;
Luke 22:18;
Mark 14:25

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians
11:26

Forget being forgotten

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain. For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.¹

Here the apostle Paul reminds us as “brothers and sisters” of the “good news” (gospel) that has been proclaimed. It’s the message Paul wants believers in Corinth to “hold firmly to.” Paul summarizes the key elements of that message—those things he considers to be “of first importance”: Christ’s death, burial and resurrection, which all were “in accordance with the scriptures.” Paul’s point is that when it comes to Christianity, Christ is above all else. Moreover, his birth, life, death and burial must not be separated or viewed in isolation from his resurrection, ascension and return. It’s all one complete work because Jesus is a complete, living Savior who brings wholeness to our fractured and fragmented world and lives.

Paul goes on to speak of Jesus as the one who encounters us. This is what we see in the Gospel’s post-resurrection accounts. In one way, Easter is not fundamentally about the resurrection event, but about the risen (resurrected) Lord as a person. To make his point, Paul emphasizes the stories of Jesus’ encounter with Peter (Cephas), with the apostles as a group (the twelve), then with more than 500 brothers and sisters (disciples). Paul then mentions Jesus’ encounter with James and with all the apostles. Last, he mentions his own encounter with Christ (an apparent reference to the Damascus Road event). Paul lists himself last (in order and priority) because he knows he fought the Lord, trying to stop his kingdom by persecuting his church.

Paul knows it is only by grace that the Lord appeared to him at all. The reality of that grace should encourage us: the Lord will not leave anyone out of his encounter. When it comes to the risen Lord, we can *forget ever being forgotten!* In Jesus Christ, by the

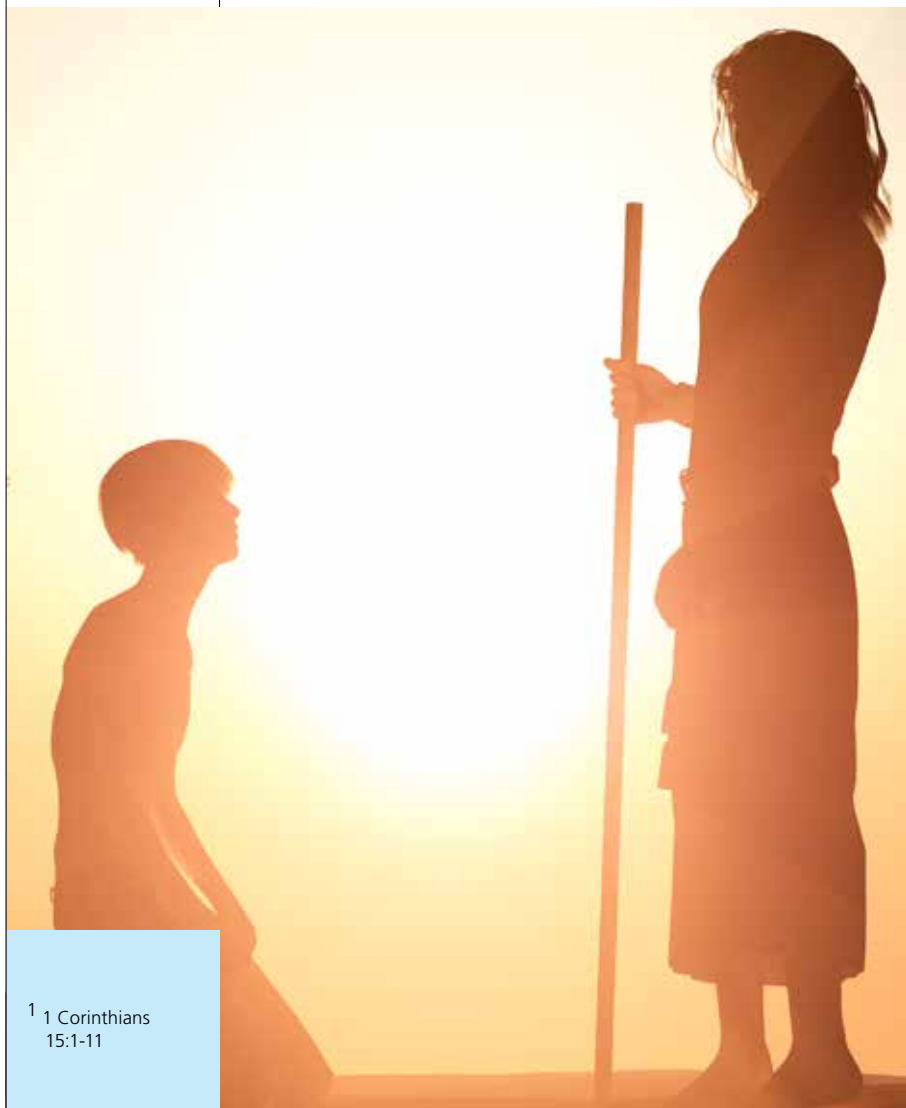
by
**Lance and
Georgia
McKinnon**

Spirit, the Father has re-membered us all. *To God be the glory!*

Paul understands that this grace of remembering is not without its effect in our ongoing lives. He says that, in his case, he “worked harder” than all the other apostles. He is not bragging here; not making a statement of comparison to look better. Rather he understands that grace had more work to do in him in making him an apostle.

We too can participate in the work of grace that the risen Christ, by the Spirit, is doing in our lives. Jesus didn’t rise from the tomb so we could be mere spectators of his now-glorified humanity. We were raised with him so that we may participate in that life with him. Indeed, *Jesus is our life*. To participate in some other “life” amounts to looking for “the living among the dead.” □

Happy Easter!



¹ 1 Corinthians
15:1-11

Idols and Icons

In this article we will look at how concepts of God have developed even through the scriptures.

Beauty ... often best described with wordless wonder. We all recognize beauty because it somehow finds resonance within us. Beauty is not something we simply behold ... it's something we enter into. It disrupts our indifference and draws us to what is worth pursuing. Beauty awakens desire; it is what makes us alive. The more we try to ignore it, the more we lose ourselves and our reason for being.

We can all recognize the beauty in this scene. Yet, we also know that no matter how beautiful this scene is, no one scene captures all that beauty is. Beauty can never be exhausted by any one definition, any one picture, or any one form. Beauty cannot be mastered but unreservedly gives itself in friendship; it can never be controlled but continually invites us to participate in its own reality. Beauty cannot be limited to any one definition, yet it continually gives itself to anyone who is simply prepared to be astonished.

It is this moment of awe, this moment of wordless, breathless wonder that we know beauty most fully.

A friend of mine took his daughter for her very first big hike.

It was a rather demanding hike for a young child – two hours one way – but the promise of a waterfall and the excitement of exploring new terrains seemed to all that was needed to energize her for this journey.

They finally reached their destination and what a sight awaited them! A magnificent waterfall in all its glory ... just took their breath away.

The thunderous sound was overwhelming.

At one point she reached into her bag, took out her water container, emptied the contents it and then slowly made her way to the edge of the waterfall to fill it all up again. She carefully sealed it and put it back in her bag.

They spend the afternoon just enjoying the waterfall; having a picnic. Their journey on the way home was filled with conversation and plans of bringing mom and the rest of the family to come and enjoy this beautiful experience. When they eventually got home, she called

by
Andre Rabe

her mom. With great excitement she took the bottle of water and told everyone to be quiet. She opened it, but her excitement turned to disappointment.

She looked to her dad and said: "...but dad you heard it!"

Suddenly he realized what was happening and he had to explain to her that the roar of that waterfall could not be captured. When you take that water out of its context it loses its roar.

This girl was obviously sincere in her attempt to capture that moment ... to preserve that experience of beauty that she simply wanted to share with others. Aren't we the same ... but there are some things that aren't supposed to be captured?

God and beauty have much in common.

God is less like statements that has to be [must be] believed and more like beauty we fall in love with.

...and just as beauty, God can never be captured with any one definition, any one statement, any one text [or] any one language. God has never subjected Himself to our understanding of Him, for He is not subject to any form of control. Yet He unreservedly gives Himself to anyone who is simply prepared to be astonished. As we encounter this surprising gift of love, we know that this experience is more real and more true than any attempt at defining it.

God ... and concepts of God are not the same. And God reveals Himself, not concepts about Himself. When this distinction is not clear it's so easy for our concepts of God to become abstract idols ... not unlike the girl's little container with which she tried to capture that roaring waterfall. We want to share the moment, we want to share this inspiration with others but there are two distinctly different ways to go about it. Our concepts of God can become either idols or icons.

What is the difference between an idol and an icon?

Well since earliest times, people have tried to preserve that glimpse and we resorted to our art, to paint, to sculpt. Idols became some of the means by which we tried to capture the divine. And therein lies its perversion. In reality the idols capture our vision of the



divine yet it pretends to have captured God Himself.

How difficult it is for words to accurately describe this beauty without pretending to have captured it. When our concepts of God ... when we insist that our interpretation of sacred scripture is what captured the face of God Himself... that's when our concepts become idols.

Does this mean that we should abandon all attempts at describing God? Should we rather just be silent and experience this mystical union?

Not at all!

Once we recognize this inherent danger we may discover yet a completely more valuable way of using our words. When our words inspire others to go and experience the beauty of who and what God is, our words have found their greatest calling. Language finds its greatest fulfillment when it symbolizes beauty and its greatest perversion in claiming to have captured it.

Idols claim to possess, Icons symbolize. Very much like the icons we have on our computer screens that we can click on to open up applications give us access to information that's much larger than the icon. In the same way, when our words point beyond themselves, when our concepts point beyond themselves, they become icons of beauty.

2 Corinthians 3:18 speaks about this event in which we behold Christ as in a mirror.

Idols are produced when we withdraw from that moment of inspiration too quickly, when we, at the first glimpse draw back and start defining the experience. Icons, on the other hand, are developed when we do not withdraw but we continue to look, we continue to behold and gaze until we discover another gaze more intently focussed on us. Icons represent this gaze that we have not captured; this gaze that is infinitely more than what we have glimpsed.

You see in this place of encounter, we are no longer simply occupied with what we see but we are mesmerized by what is seen in us.

And so our faces are transformed into the visible mirror of this invisible gaze.

Did you know that Jesus is called the icon of the invisible God?¹ Jesus does not come to exhaust the revelation of who and what God is but he is the introduction into an ever unfolding revelation, and ever unfolding experience that is larger than ourselves. If Jesus is indeed the self-revelation of God, then He is also the end of our concepts about God. He is the icon that eliminates our idols, our abstract theories with which we try to define the infinite and confine the limitless.

Jesus comes first and foremost, not to strengthen your faith in God, but to make you an atheist in the god of your own making. He comes to bring your faith, your way of subjecting God to your own understanding to an end.

It is only at this place where our ideas and our faith are completely devastated that we have an opportunity to meet the God who transcends all our ideas about God. This is why so many church fathers and mystics have said something similar to this: To experience God

is to experience the complete and utter failure of your own intellect.

This does not mean that we abandon our intellectual pursuit of Him. The silence that best describes God is not a silence of emptiness, but rather the awe at the superabundance of what can be said about Him. In this place of encounter our concepts are continually drawn by the infinite God to transcend its own limits.

And so our concepts become icons of the infinite experience of God beyond any one definition.

Song of Songs 2:14 says:

Come away my beloved
to the clefts of the rock,
in the crannies of the cliff,
I want to see your face,
I want to hear your voice,
for your voice is lovely,
and your face so sweet.

Can you sense God drawing you to encounter with Himself beyond any pre-defined expectations. If you have found yourself disappointed with God, maybe what you've been disappointed with has been your concepts of God. But God is ready to surprise you, He is ready to astonish you, with a beauty that you are part of.

And may I also ask you that in our proclamation of this gospel, may we proclaim to people more ... may we introduce them to more than our concepts about God. May we point beyond our own theories and ideas and introduce them to the One who adores them ... the One who's glory is displayed on their faces.

I am the stirring in your being,
the elusive beauty beyond,
and the space between.
I am no stagnant destination,
a statement confined,
a concept defined,
but the path,
the living story,
the narrative unending.
I am what happens,
when you recognize the mystery in the music,
the silence,
the sounds,
the crescendo to come.
I am the gift of distance,
the awareness of presence,
elusive and self-giving,
evading and overwhelming.
I am no thing,
the infinite possibility
of everything.
I am who desires you,
although I have no need of you.

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¹ Colossians 1:15

The New Covenant is older than you think

Christians are under the guidance and authority of the new covenant, not the old covenant. This brings up an important question: What is the relationship between the two covenants?

It's sometimes said that the new covenant is a magnification of the old. In an informal way of speaking, this may be acceptable. However, by thinking of the new covenant as only a modification of the old, we may be led to accept the erroneous idea that the new grew out of the old. If the new covenant is only an expanded version of the old, then this creates a question. Perhaps some of the practices (such as avoiding unclean meats) commanded under the old should also be commanded in the new?

Also, to say that the new covenant develops from the old is to imply that the new is only a Johnny-come-lately, whose existence depends on something that came before it. We might be left with the wrong conclusion that the old covenant is the real basis for the new. This is absolutely not the case. That's why the title of this article is "The new covenant is older than you think." This title insists on the ironic conclusion that the new covenant existed long before the old covenant did.

The old covenant existed on a much lower, physical plane. It was kind of a teaching tool pointing to the intent of that which was God's original and ongoing purpose with humanity. This covenant had a limited existence for a specific time in history for a specific people under special circumstances. The best it could do was point, for a limited time and in a somewhat veiled way, to the reality of God's purpose in Christ—the new covenant.

On the other hand, the new covenant should be understood as *timeless*. We cannot attach an age to it, because it goes back to "the beginning." It was the original plan all along—what some theologians call "the covenant of grace," the covenant under which all other covenants were given. Creation has never existed

by Paul Kroll

without the new covenant, even though God's purpose is not yet fully achieved.

The New Testament insists that the new covenant goes back to the beginning. Of course, such passages do not use the words "new covenant." For this reason we need to get a working definition of the new covenant so we can understand when it is being spoken about. Essentially, the new covenant can be defined in the following phrase: the working out of God's purpose to create human beings to transform them out of their fallen condition into the image of his Son, and give them eternal life.

But here is where things get complicated. We infer from Scripture that God purposed human beings to be created in such a way as to allow them – if they choose – to become prisoners of the fallen world order, which includes sin and death.

Bondage to sin and decay

We understand this aspect of the new covenant from the New Testament. The apostle Paul, for example, summed it up with these words:

"The creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan

inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we are saved." ¹

Our bondage to sin and decay forms the underlying problem the new covenant is meant to deal with. Without the new covenant promises, every human would die and decay into eternal nothingness. God's purpose would be stopped dead in its tracks. But we know the rest of the story—the new covenant. God



provided a means whereby sinning humans could be rescued from the evil world order, from Satan² as well as from sin and death. God, in the person of the Son or Word, would become a human being (Jesus Christ), would die for humanity's sins, and be resurrected as Savior.

God would forgive humans their sins, image them in his Son through the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, and ultimately raise them from the dead. Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the new covenant. Under the new covenant, sin and death are defeated, and God's purpose to provide humans with eternal life comes to pass. That is the new covenant in a nutshell.

But to say it again, the new covenant is much older—eternally older—than the old covenant. (Since God's purpose ultimately wins out, his purpose is as good as done, even before it occurs it is manifested in creation.) A number of New Testament verses testify to the eternal existence of God's plan, now known as the new covenant. These scriptures refer to the promise of Christ's atoning work and God's purpose to give eternal life in him.

Christ is the basis of the new covenant. Let's see, in rapid-fire fashion, how insistently these scriptures tell us of the eternal existence of the new covenant.

The new covenant is God's "eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."³

- Jesus (the Lamb) "was slain from the creation of the world."⁴
- We were redeemed from our empty way of life by the blood of Christ, who "was chosen before the creation of the world."⁵
- God's "work has been finished since the creation of the world."⁶
- It was God's purpose to choose humans for salvation "before the creation of the world."⁷
- The kingdom we are to inherit has been prepared "since the creation of the world."⁸
- God's purpose to save us and call us to his grace "was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time."⁹
- The new covenant has been eternally in existence. It is "the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time."¹⁰

Hidden purpose

The new covenant is extremely old. It appears new only because it didn't come into general force until nearly 2,000 years ago. The fact of its existence before this time was generally hidden from humans. (It was discussed in the Hebrew Scriptures, but we see this primarily in retrospect, because the Reality has now come.)

One of Jesus' purposes was to reveal the prior existence of this eternal new covenant. Matthew, quoting one of the prophets, said of Jesus' teaching: "I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world."¹¹ Paul said God's new covenant purpose to include all people in his plan of salvation "has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints."¹² It was, said Paul, "God's secret wisdom."¹³ Elements

of the new covenant, however, existed partially long before the old covenant. Here are some examples.

- The new covenant ministry of Melchizedek existed before the old covenant ministry of Levi.¹⁴ The new covenant high priest in the Melchizedek line existed before the old covenant high priest Aaron.
- John tells us that the Logos existed before Moses.
- The new covenant "fruits" of the Holy Spirit existed before the giving of the old covenant law at Sinai.
- Salvation was given by grace to people such as Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham long before the old covenant people of Israel.¹⁵ In Galatians 3:8, Paul says God "announced the gospel"—the new covenant—"in advance to Abraham."

The fact that the new covenant existed before the old has many implications for us. As Christians, we would want to look to that which came first—to the real thing—as our authority for truth and that in which we put our hope. That's the new covenant. We would not look to the old covenant, which was but a temporary imitation—a copy or shadow.

Since the old covenant has become obsolete, it would of itself not determine how we should worship God. The old covenant institutions—temple, Levitical priesthood, law etched on stones, various worship regulations and the sacrificial system—would not be normative for us under the new. That is, we would not determine what must be done under the new covenant by looking at the institutions of the old. The book of Hebrews makes this clear. So does Paul in his letters.

Shadow and reality

Let's summarize the difference between the two covenants. The old covenant institutions were the shadow; the new covenant is the eternally existing reality. The shadow points to the real thing, and cannot exist by itself. The new covenant does not grow out of the old, just as a shadow does not grow out of the reality. Rather, the old covenant grew out of the new. Under the old covenant, Israel became the matrix or setting for the coming of Jesus Christ and his redemptive work.

The new covenant did not come into existence with Christ's death, resurrection and coming of the Spirit (although that is when the old covenant ended), nor did the new covenant come into existence with Abraham. The new covenant came into existence as God's original purpose for the human race. Even from before the beginning of time, God has purposed and promised to be gracious to all humanity, to bring us into a joy-filled, never-ending relationship with Father, Son and Spirit.

The very old "new" covenant is the authority for how we are to live our lives in Christ and the framework – through Christ – of our faith. □

¹ Romans 8:20-24

² Ephesians 2:2;
1 Corinthians 4:4 ;
Revelation 12:9

³ Ephesians 3:11

⁴ Revelation 13:8

⁵ 1 Peter 1:18-20

⁶ Hebrews 4:3

⁷ Ephesians 1:4

⁸ Matthew 25:34

⁹ 2 Timothy 1:8-9

¹⁰ Titus 1:2

¹¹ Matthew 13:35

¹² Colossians 1:26

¹³ John 13:1-15

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 2:7

¹⁵ Hebrews 7

¹⁶ Hebrews 11:5-12

How does God

Scripture tells God will judge *the living and the dead*.¹ So how does he judge us?

Different ideas

There are different ideas how God judges us. Some believe he will weigh all our good and bad deeds in a spiritual balance. If our good deeds exceed our bad ones he will send us to heaven and if our bad deeds exceed our good ones he will send us to hell.

Some Christians say we must live a holy life and do lots of good works to be qualified for entrance into heaven. Others say we are saved by grace through faith in Christ, not by our good works or good behaviour.

This article explains how God judges us. But first, let's explain what the word *judgment* means.

Meaning of judgment

The Greek word for judgment is *krisis*. It means *coming to know God's truth and then deciding whether to accept or not*. Jesus tells us, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."² That means judgement has to do with how we respond to his truth and way of life.

Scripture assures everyone who believes in Christ will be saved - have eternal life. Believing here means entering into a personal relationship with him and participating in his life. Those who don't believe alienate themselves from the abundant life God offers them. That will be their choice - not his.

Sooner or later, in one way or another, everyone will hear this truth. That includes even the dead. Each person is given the choice and will have to make a decision to say either yes, or no, to his gift of eternal life. It is a personal choice they must each make.

Judgment principles

We will discuss four principles that can help us understand how God judges people. Then we will illustrate these with parables.

Principle 1: Everyone is included. God has included *everyone* in his salvation plan. He doesn't want anyone to be excluded from his kingdom life. He wants all to come to repentance - change their mind about God and themselves - and receive his gift of eternal life.³ This gift is irrevocable;⁴ meaning, God will *never* change his mind about you! You are *included*!

Paul tells us: "...if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you *will* be saved...For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is *rich* to all who call upon Him. For *whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved*."⁵ Even our calling on the name of the Lord is by grace. It is God's Spirit that leads us to repentance and faith in Christ.



by
Dr. P. Sellappan

Principle 2: Judgment flows from God's grace.

In God's economy, grace reigns supreme. We receive salvation by grace through faith in Christ. Even that faith comes from him. We can never purchase eternal life with money or good works or good behaviour. God offers salvation freely to everyone who wants it. If anyone thinks he (or she) is unworthy of eternal life because of some bad/wrong he has done, he has not understood God's grace. God's grace covers *all* sin.

Principle 3: Judgment is based solely on our



response. God offers salvation to all, but each one of us must individually respond to his offer. We are judged based on our response - our acceptance or rejection. God *never* forces us to accept his offer of salvation, but *always* give us the freedom to choose. In order for God's *love* to be true, we must also be free. *Love and freedom* go together.

Principle 4: Judgement and revelation (Christ revealing Himself) seem to occur only after one has made the choice, either to believe, or reject God's offer of salvation. For some it may be now, for some it may be later, for some it may be after death. So the timing of judgment may be different for different people. God has no deadline by which they must repent

od judge us?

and accept his salvation. Regardless of the timing, all will be judged.

Parables illustrating the principles

Let's illustrate these principles with four parables.

1) Wedding banquets⁶

The banquets are a picture of the Lamb's wedding to the Bride.⁷ Jesus is the Lamb of God and the Bride is the Church (all who believe and accept him as their personal Saviour).



Principle 1: All were invited—rich and poor, successful and unsuccessful, the good and the bad.⁸ The Master celebrated with wedding banquets because of his desire to share out of the wealth of his royal abundance. All were counted worthy and invited to the banquets. All they had to do was to accept his invitation, come, and enjoy the party.

Principle 2: The invitation was because of the Master's lavish grace. No one was required to show their list of good works or proof of their transformed life. All were counted worthy and received their wedding robe (symbolizing his righteousness). One of the guests, however, didn't wear his wedding robe, so he was cast out; not because he was unworthy, but because he

trusted in his own righteousness. Isaiah tells all our righteousness is like filthy rags.⁹

Principle 3: The judgment was based solely on their acceptance or rejection of the Master's invitation. The invitation had gone out. All they had to do was respond with a yes or no. Many (presumably the less successful ones) joyfully accepted his invitation, but some (presumably the more successful ones) rejected it.

Principle 4: The Master appeared (was revealed) to them only after they had responded; either for or against his invitation. Moreover, he judged them only after they had made their decision to accept or reject his invitation.

2) Talents and minas¹⁰

These parables are not about how much money the servants had made with the deposits or seed money the Lord gave them. Rather, they are about whether they trusted the Lord and participated in his business (ministry). It didn't matter if they lost their money in a bad business venture.

The first two servants trusted the Lord's goodness, so they participated in his ministry. They made money - bore fruits. The third servant didn't trust him, so he didn't participate in his ministry. He didn't make any money - didn't bear any fruit. The Lord trusted him but he didn't trust the Lord. He played it safe. Jesus tells us, "those who save their life will lose it but those who lose their life will gain it."¹¹

Principle 1: All the servants were equally favoured by the Lord as they all received the seed money. As far as the Lord was concerned, all were worthy and acceptable business partners.

Principle 2: The servants didn't deserve the money, but the Lord still gave to them freely.

Principle 3: The servants had to respond to the Lord's business proposition. The first two servants trusted the Lord, so they responded positively. They participated in his business and made money. The third servant didn't trust the Lord, so he didn't participate.

Principle 4: The Lord appeared to them after they had responded to his business proposition. He appeared to them after a long time.¹² He was hidden to them until they had responded. Then he judged them based on their response—their acceptance or rejection. He praised the first two servants for their faith in him and rebuked the third servant for being faithless.

3) Wise and foolish virgins¹³

This parable is not about how much Holy Spirit they had. Holy Spirit is God, not some potion, gas or oil. As in the other parables, this is about trusting the Bridegroom and accepting his wedding invitation.

Principle 1: All ten virgins were equally favoured and invited to the wedding party. The wise and the foolish were both worthy and acceptable.

Principle 2: The party was fully paid for. They didn't have to pay any money or show a list of good works or good behaviour to attend the party.

Principle 3: They were judged solely by their response to the Bridegroom's invitation—their acceptance or rejection. Half of them had faith and accepted his invitation while the other half didn't have faith so they rejected it.

Principle 4: The Bridegroom delayed his coming and appeared to them only after they had responded. He was hidden (not revealed) to them until they had made their decision to accept or reject his invitation.

4) Sheep and goats¹⁴

This parable is not about how much good work we have done. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. When we have entered into a personal relationship with Jesus, one rooted in *receiving love* and then *offering love* to others, we reflect both the first commandment (love God with our all), and the second commandment (love others) wonderfully! Furthermore, it helps us understand not only the phrase, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" but we live out the reality that it is our humanity that connects us both to God (image) and to each other (likeness)! While good works are *important*, they don't earn salvation. We do good works by participating in his ministry. He loves all people and wants us to imitate him - participate in his caring ministry.

This parable, like the other parables, is about *trusting* Jesus and entering into a personal *relationship* with him. The phrase, "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me," implies a personal relationship with him. It is his Spirit that motivates and enables us to good works.

Principle 1: Both the sheep and the goats were equally favoured by the King. Both were acceptable and qualified as paschal sacrifices.¹⁵ Both were invited to God's kingdom.

Principle 2: The sheep and the goats didn't have to show any credentials (good works or good behaviour) to inherit God's kingdom. Salvation is by grace and by grace alone.

Principle 3: The sheep trusted the King and participated in his caring ministry (faith-in-action). They entered into a personal relationship with him and were motivated to care for the needy. The goats, on the other hand, didn't trust him, so they didn't build a personal relationship or participate in his ministry.

Principle 4: The King was hidden to the sheep and the goats. They didn't see him until after they had responded. He was hidden "in the least of his brethren." He only appeared to them after they had responded. The King praised the sheep for their faith and rebuked the goats for their lack of faith. It didn't matter how

much or how well the sheep cared for them. They recognized Christ in them and cared for them.

Who really judges us?

Is it the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, church leadership, or us?

God tells us, "...the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son."¹⁶ Jesus tells us, "I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world... The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day..."¹⁷The Holy Spirit only echoes Christ's mind. So the whole Trinity doesn't judge us!

Who then judges us? Jesus tells us his words will judge us. So we must listen to what he tells us. He tells us he has done everything necessary for us to participate in his abundant life. Through his incarnate life, death, resurrection and ascension, he has reconciled us, forgiven us, accepted us, and adopted us into his family. *He has judged us worthy and acceptable.*

Do we believe what he tells us? If we do, we get to experience his love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness. If we don't, we condemn ourselves. We experience shame, guilt, fear and rejection. *So God's judgment is actually self-judgement.* We judge ourselves. We can agree with God and participate in his heavenly life or not agree and live in our hellish life. The choice, literally, is ours.

Final judgement

God has written everyone's name in the Book of Life. There is no condemnation whatsoever for those who are in Christ. While commandment keeping and good works are important, they cannot save us. Jesus saves us. We are saved by *grace* through faith in him.

Jesus, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will reveal himself to all – sooner or later. All who accept his invitation will receive eternal life. Those who reject cut *themselves* off from his life. It will be their choice, not God's.

God's love is unconditional, unending and unending. His love will pursue us no matter in what situation we are in. That is when Christ will be fully revealed to us. He won't be hidden from us anymore. We will see him present in us and also everyone.

God doesn't create hell. Hell is our own making. We create it in our spiritual blindness. It is totally unnecessary and no sane person will ever desire it.

The Good News is God is inviting you - right now - to his Son's grand wedding banquet. It will be the greatest banquet ever! Why wait? You can accept his invitation today and participate in his abundant life where there are pleasures forevermore. ☐

Reference

Capon, Robert F., *Kingdom, Grace, Judgment*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.

- 1 2 Timothy 4:1, 1 Peter 4:5
- 2 John 14:6
- 3 1 Timothy 2:4, Titus 2:11, 2 Peter 3:9
- 4 Romans 12:29
- 5 Romans 10:9–13
- 6 Matthew 22:1–14, Luke 14:15–24
- 7 Revelation 19:9
- 8 Matthew 22:10
- 9 Isaiah 64:6
- 10 Matthew 25:14–30, Luke 19:11–27
- 11 Matthew 16:25
- 12 Matthew 25:19
- 13 Matthew 25:1–13
- 14 Mat 25:31–46
- 15 Exodus 12:5, Leviticus 16
- 16 John 5:22
- 17 John 12:47–48

Do you feel like an underdog?

I know what it's like to be made fun of. As a child I wasn't popular because I was the bookworm type--a skinny kid with thick glasses, frequently called "Four Eyes."

"Underdog" refers to one who is expected to lose a contest or struggle such as a sports event, or one who is at a disadvantage. Or, we might say an underdog is considered a "loser" or a "nobody." Maybe you view yourself as having no important skills or opportunities to accomplish much. Perhaps you aren't good-looking, or aren't particularly well-liked. Maybe you have been ridiculed because you are poor, or handicapped, or because of your Christian beliefs.

If you or I view ourselves negatively, or if others view us negatively, we are not alone.

Joseph

His brothers didn't like him. In fact, they tried to get rid of him by selling him into slavery. But their sinister efforts worked out in a dramatically unexpected way. Joseph rose out of slavery to become the number two ruler in Egypt under Pharaoh, where he was able to save Egypt, and his own family from a deadly famine. When his brothers finally recognized him, they humbly bowed before him, no longer seeing him as a loser, but as one whom God had mightily used to save their lives.

David

The Lord told Samuel the prophet to go to the home of Jesse to anoint the future king of Israel. The Lord told Samuel He would indicate to him the one to anoint. When Samuel arrived, Jesse presented seven of his older sons to Samuel, confident that he would choose one of them. But Samuel rejected all seven. Instead, he asked Jesse if he had another son. Jesse said he had one more son, but it was just young David, thinking he couldn't be the one, he's just a shepherd. But the Lord told Samuel, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he."¹

In due time the Lord empowered the "shepherd boy" to conquer the giant Goliath, inspired him to write hundreds of songs, and established him as the king of Israel.

Gideon

When the Lord decided it was time to free the Israelites from oppression by the Midianites, He responded to the Israelites' prayers for deliverance. The Lord sent an angel to Gideon, who was threshing wheat. The angel told Gideon that he would be the one to deliver Israel from the Midianites. Gideon was dismayed: "But Lord," he asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."² Gideon doubted the Lord's words, asking for two miraculous signs that what He had told him was true. The Lord responded giving those signs. Gideon, in spite of his low opinion of himself, did



by
Paul Hailey

go on to lead the defeat of the Midianites, freeing Israel from years of hardship.

Jesus, the ultimate underdog

He was believed to be illegitimate. He wasn't especially handsome, with no outstanding physical features. He was known simply as "Jesus the carpenter", or "Jesus, the son of Joseph," living in Nazareth, considered a town of uneducated people.

When He began preaching the Pharisees and others publicly taunted Him. At times His family rejected Him. Toward the end of His life He was falsely accused, spit upon, mocked, and beaten. He suffered the disgrace of crucifixion, a gruesome fate reserved for the worst criminals. His closest friends, the Apostles, fled the scene, except for Peter, who denied knowing Him.

But Jesus conquered sin and death and became our Lord and Savior, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, your Savior and mine.³

How does Jesus view you and me?

We may view ourselves as underdogs. Others may view us as losers. In fact, Scripture does indeed say that most Christians *are* the weak and foolish of the world.⁴ But that doesn't mean we can't accomplish much in the Lord's service. Quite the opposite! We are the type of people He uses!

I know a man who spent several years in prison for plotting to have a man murdered. Now he is a fine Christian helping many troubled people as a Christian counselor. He is not unique. Many of God's most productive servants have come out of wayward lifestyles.

The Apostle Paul, in writing to the Christian church in Corinth, noted that some members of their congregation had been idolaters, adulterers, thieves, drunkards, and swindlers. But he said, "...But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."⁵ In spite of their past lives, they were free to blossom and grow as Christians. God didn't want them, or us today, to be burdened by past mistakes, and He is more than willing to raise us to new heights of service. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"⁶

As the Lord told Samuel when He sent him to anoint the future king of Israel, "man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."⁷ It doesn't matter how others view us, or how we view ourselves. If we have a heart for serving God, we can present ourselves to Him. He can use us in ways we may have never imagined.

When the Lord presented Isaiah with the opportunity to be used as a prophet, Isaiah responded, "Here I am. Send me!" If the Lord presents us with an opportunity to serve Him, let's respond "Here I am. Send me!"

- 1 1 Samuel 16:12
- 2 Judges 6:15, 16
- 3 Revelation 19:16
2 Peter 3:9
- 4 1 Corinthians 1:27
- 5 1 Corinthians 6:11
- 6 Romans 8:31
Luke 14:15-24
- 7 1 Samuel 16:7

Reflections on incarnation and resurrection

Have you ever heard the story about a little boy who was really scared one night during a big thunderstorm? He calls out to his father from his bed, "Daddy, I'm scared. Will you please come in here?" His dad, who was also in bed, and just about to fall asleep said, "Son, it's alright. God is with you in your room right now. You are ok. Go to sleep." The little boy anxiously answered back, "Dad, PLEASE, right now I need someone with skin on!"

by
Alyson Sousa

1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Did you know that there is a twist in the original language regarding the phrase, "the Word was with God?" This actually could be translated, "the Word was CONTINUALLY TOWARD God. God the father and God the Son were FACE-TO-FACE continually!" Could we be there too and have simply lost sight of Him... in us?

Catherine of Genoa said, "My self is God, nor is any other self known to me except MY GOD." Could it be that it was when Adam and Eve lost sight of this most profound truth- that we exist best in a personal LOVE relationship with God that death entered the picture? God made Adam and Eve and ALL of humanity in His

This past year, one of the many things that I came to genuinely value is that God (LOVE) is NOT only objective, but subjective. Didn't we again just recently have the opportunity to reflect on this truth this past Christmas season? LOVE was embodied! The Objective mystery (GOD) became the subjective reality (Jesus) in the one whose birth we just celebrated. I wonder... could it be that we all share a common desire to be seen, each one of us... subjectively, and known... genuinely, in all of our raw humanity? Don't we all want to belong, and simply feel included, and be unconditionally accepted and loved? Might God have known of our desperate need for relational and personal experience, for someone like us... with skin on?

Could Jesus, the GOD/man be God's answer to these questions? Perhaps the Creator became the created in Jesus? Perhaps Jesus lived, and gave His life for, and rose again to bring us back into SEEING the LOVE relationship we have always existed in? I wonder... do you think we were created from the beginning because God needed us, or because God desired and LOVED us? Ephesians 1:4 says, "He (God) associated us in Christ BEFORE the fall of the world! Jesus is God's mind made up about mankind! He always knew IN HIS LOVE that He would present us AGAIN FACE-TO-FACE before Him in blameless innocence (Mirror Translation). In the book of John, John also goes back to a time before there was a planet called earth when he tells us in John



very own Image and likeness¹ and it was only when Adam and Eve turned away from that FACE-TO-FACE LOVE relationship, and forgot who they really were and believed the lie that they were cut off from LOVE Himself that they became twisted in their desires... desperate in their loneliness... fearful in their inadequacies... and toxic in how they related to God, themselves and others. At times, my own life and journey have reflected this reality, and my own determined religious attempts to be 'good enough' for God, to gain and secure for myself something... someone... whose very LOVE I was blind to, but in fact have always had... and whose very Image and likeness I have been created, but only now am beginning to understand. Do we not also see this in the world around us? In believing this lie we become those who refuse mutuality, who are terrified of vulnerability, who are starved for genuine intimacy, and addicted to anything and everything that will momentarily provide for what we think we lack. We literally mirror/reflect what we see and believe, don't we?

Though the late Rene' Girard's expansive body of thought, work, and contribution defies classification, really it was he who discovered that humans grow and become who they are through an unconscious process called mimesis. Richard Rohr echo's Girard when he says, "ALL personhood is created in this process." Said another way, we learn and develop by mirroring the desire and intent of others, as we look to them to inform us about who we are, and what we want, about what is valuable, and what is worthy of our attention. You see, our brains are made up of mirror neurons and so we reflect, as in a mirror, what and how we see and perceive. In the simplest terms, humans become what they behold, and so it is very important to examine what it is we are looking at, and HOW we are interpreting what we see. After all, perception is reality... they say. Since God created us this way, might He have known that we would need Subjective encounter(s), as in a mirror, FACE-TO-FACE with God (LOVE) in His Son Jesus? Furthermore, the resurrected Christ, before He ascended into Heaven said to His disciples, "it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate (Holy Spirit) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you."² Could it be that we are re-formed in this FACE-TO-FACE relationship encounter with His spirit in All of humanity; since we are ALL made in His image and likeness?

"A TRUE mirror first receives an image and then reflects it back truthfully- but now so that I can see myself too. The all important thing is that you find the right mirror that mirrors you honestly and at depth, and our job is always to stay inside this mirroring (Richard Rohr)." Jesus said, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you."³ Moreover, this God "is not a stranger to anyone; whatever can be known of God is evident in EVERY human life. His invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and PERCEIVED in what God has made."⁴ So, could it be that this God whose connection with Himself... who is Them (Trinity) lives inside a mirroring relationship of LOVE and desire from which all of humanity have been 'MADE' and are created? Could it be that He is that TRUE mirror that reflects the human race honestly, and whose desire and LOVE for us ALL will transform us?

If it was God's LOVING desire that formed us as mirror beings, and if our desires and intentions are molded in

relationships and suggested to us by others who are like us and who we unconsciously mirror, it is significant that we understand that our problems (SIN) began when we turned away from our FACE-TO-FACE relationship with God, whose Image and likeness we bear. For it is God who is our TRUEST model. In turning away from God, our TRUE reference for who we really are as sons and daughters, we became alienated (blind) in our own minds,⁵ and began living as those who believe the lie that we are separated, not only from God, but from ourselves, and each other. Could it be that our LOVING Father anguished over this; so much so, that He wrapped Himself in flesh, and was willing to enter fully into our inherent blindness? Might genuine atonement (at-one-ment), in its very essence, simply be that we begin to SEE CLEARLY our reflection in Him, and to be brought back to beholding HIM, who is LOVE... FACE-TO-FACE? Could it be that the incarnation and resurrection of Christ re-established this FACE-TO-FACE communion; both before, as one who was fully human, and who fully identified with the agony of our perceived separation, and after, as one who was brutally tortured, sacrificed, and murdered at humanity's hands,⁶ making Him the only resurrected victim who ever modeled total and complete forgiveness!

"If the source of this disharmony between ourselves, ourselves and God, and ourselves and creation, is our own inherent blindness, then harmonious at-one-ment involves the kind of revelation that shatters our isolating illusions and reveals us as located in the bosom of our Abba." (Andre Rabe: Desire Found Me - Page 310) Could it be that Christ faithfully modeled in His short life, in His tragic death, and in His miraculous resurrection, a way of being; of TRUSTFULLY receiving... of relationally LOVING... of ALWAYS FORGIVING... and ETERNALLY reflecting... His own inner image and TRUEST essence... so that we too might understand that ALL goodness... ALL LOVE is born out of a reflective and deeply personal relationship with Him? Perhaps we can genuinely know this relationship in all of its beauty and depth as we agree and participate INSIDE of this LOVE... and then begin to reflect and offer it to others whereby this INNER REALITY becomes the 'OUTER LIFE OF ALL OF CREATION'... Perhaps JESUS mirrors our completeness and endorses our TRUE identities? Perhaps He is "I AM" in us.⁷ □

¹ John 6:32-33, 58

² Gen. 14:18

³ Exodus 12:39

⁴ Exodus. 16:2-4

⁵ Colossians 1:21

⁶ Acts 4:8-12

⁷ Colossians 2:10

The Bread of Heaven



Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.... This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.”¹

Bread, the staff of life, has been a staple food for thousands of years. Whether made from wheat, rye, barley, millet, rice or even potato flour, it has been the basic diet of common people. Bread has been synonymous with food for ordinary working people of many cultures.

As the common food of the average Israelite, it featured frequently in the spiritual consciousness and the ceremonial and sacrificial worship of ancient Israel.

The bread and wine that Abraham shared with Melchizedek king of Salem were a customary expression of peace and fellowship. To break bread with someone was an act of communion.² The unleavened bread of the Exodus reminded them of the haste and eagerness with which they had left their life of bondage in Egypt, on their way to a life of liberty as a new nation in their own land.³ They remembered the manna in the wilderness—bread from heaven that had preserved their lives during the journey from Egypt through the wilderness to their new home in Canaan.⁴ The Bread of the Presence, or showbread, that was placed daily in the holy place of the Temple, reminded them that God was their Provider and Sustainer, and they lived constantly in his presence.

So when Jesus said, “I am the bread of heaven, the

by
Don Mears

bread of God, the bread of life,” he was tapping into a rich reservoir of religious symbolism, historical tradition and cultural associations. Bread had represented many things to the Jews in the past.

But now Jesus challenged them to see that these historical meanings had been wrapped up in, and were superseded by, one great new meaning. The true bread was not the unleavened bread of the Exodus, or the manna of the wilderness, or the bread of the presence in the Temple. The true bread is Jesus Christ!

Jesus had adopted an ancient and familiar symbol, and had given it a new and fuller significance. The new significance was not totally unrelated to the ancient significances, but it went much further.

For Abraham, breaking bread with Melchizedek had been an act of communion on the human level. But when we Christians partake of Jesus, the bread of God, we have communion not just with one another, but with him and with the Father.

Israel’s unleavened bread reminded them of fleeing Egypt to a new life in Canaan. But for Christians, that exodus was symbolic of our entrance into the new life in the kingdom of God. The manna from heaven preserved Israel’s life during their journey through the wilderness. Christians rejoice that in Jesus, the bread of heaven, our lives are nourished and kept safe as we journey toward the fullness of eternal life.

The showbread reminded Israel that God was the Provider and Sustainer of their earthly lives. Christians know that in Jesus, the true bread, our lives are lifted up above the mundane, earthly level, and we live with him “in the heavenly realms.”⁵ Jesus showed that the meaning of ancient traditions can be superseded by a new and eternal revelation.□

¹John 6:32-33, 58

²Gen. 14:18

³Exodus 12:39

⁴Exodus. 16:2-4

⁵Ephesians 2:6

Do you want to get well?

The smartphone has revolutionized the way we receive information and news on happenings in the country and around the world. The various Apps available that can be downloaded have enabled us to receive a constant barrage of video clips on almost any event that occurs worldwide. I receive many uplifting and inspiring videos on people and events that make me appreciate the kindness and love shown by caring individuals. However, the world isn't a place of peace and tranquility and the smartphone has brought the ugliest aspects of humanity directly to us. We used to read about or listen to news of horrible events but now with the steady stream of video clips that go viral we see first hand the blood and gore plus the evil that occurs everywhere.

I cringe every time a video clip of an atrocity appears on my phone. I have received numerous video clips of horrendous cruelty which were sent by friends and acquaintances. I make it a point to delete all of them. Most of these events occurred in some foreign country but even ugly local events appear from time to time. I never want my family to see these ugly scenes as it would surely cause immense anxiety and terror in their hearts. What puzzles me is the fact that some people relish sending these extreme clips to others. They certainly succeed in creating shock and horror to whoever they send it to. These incidents may have occurred to other people but what if we or our families were the victims. Would we enjoy sending such clips if our loved ones were the victims? People are becoming more and more desensitized to cruelty and horror as a constant stream of such events dulls their conscience. I choose to be alert and conscious of evil in our midst but take no pleasure in watching the sufferings of others. The question I ask myself is whether there will be a time when such ugliness and wickedness will no longer exist in this world?

Were we created to live this way? Religion has never solved the problem of wickedness. In fact some of the worst atrocities are committed in the name of God. Politics is no solution. Wealth is no security. Greed, corruption, insanity, immorality, violence, crime and hate are increasing everywhere. God created humanity to live in his presence in love and joy. We chose the opposite. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God they literally decided to try doing what felt right in their own sight.¹ We have followed the same way ever since and constantly blame God for allowing evil to exist on this Earth. Many have denied that a God really exists. Well, God never wanted evil to be part of life but evil is the consequence of trying to live contrary to God's ways. However, humanity is not doomed to live under the umbrella of evil forever.

The solution has already been given to us. It is not by our wisdom or effort. The solution is a person. God the Father sent his Son Jesus Christ to remove the consequences of sin by giving Himself as a sacrifice for



by
Devaraj Ramoo

humanity. Christ shed his blood on the cross to pay for the sins of mankind and restore humanity to a loving relationship with God as we were always intended to be. Man on his own volition can never find the solution.

The Gospel of John tells of an incident where Jesus finds a man who had been sick with and infirmity for thirty-eight years. Jesus knew the man had been suffering for such a long time. He came up to him and asked, "Do you want to be made well?" The man replied that he was helpless with no one willing to help him. Jesus then said, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." Immediately the man was completely healed.² The same Jesus is asking humanity and personally to every one of us the exact question he asked the man. He knows we cannot get up from the infirmity brought on by sin. When we let him into our lives by accepting the grace of God through Jesus, we in effect have found the solution to the agony of evil on the Earth. Our lives will experience the peace and love of God through the forgiveness of sins. We will experience peace as never before and eventually Christ will return to usher a new age where there will be no evil on Earth. But for now my friends, "Do YOU want to get well?" ☐



¹ Genesis 3: 1-24

² John 5: 1-12

An anchor for life

Have you ever felt that you needed an anchor for your life? That the storms of life were trying to smash you on the rocks? For some people, it might be family problems. For others, it might be the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, or a serious illness.

Such trials can overwhelm us like a wave that crashes upon a ship. Gone are the memories of peaceful sailing on smooth seas—all we can think of for the moment is the trial we are in right now. Will we survive, or will we sink? Sometimes the turmoil is so great that sinking doesn't seem that bad of an option!

To weather the storms of life, we need an anchor to keep us in place, to keep us from being swept toward the rocky shore, to keep us from capsizing and sinking. What is our anchor?

The book of Hebrews tells us that we have an anchor—the sure hope of salvation through Jesus Christ. This is the hope set before us, the hope that greatly encourages us. “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”¹

Verse 20 tells us that this hope enters the presence of God in heaven, where Jesus is already helping us. Our hope of eternal life is anchored in heaven, where the storms of this life can never sink our ship! Our salvation is safe and secure.

The storms still come, though, and rage around us. The waves beat on us, but we need not fear—our anchor is in the unsinkable heavens. Our lives are safeguarded by Jesus himself. Our anchor will keep our lives safe—as long as life itself will last. That means forever! We have an anchor for life, a point of stability when life gets rough. Don't wait for the storms to begin—anchor your life in Jesus now!

Parable of stability

Jesus taught something similar in the Sermon on the Mount:

Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.²



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**

Jesus describes two groups of people: those who follow him, and those who don't. Both types of people build good-looking houses. Both types of people can appear to have their lives in order. But the storms of life strike them both, and the houses are tested not so much for how they look on the outside, but how well they are built underneath.

Listening to Jesus does not prevent the rain, water and wind—the problems of life—but it does prevent collapse. When the storms of life beat upon us, we need some solid foundations to keep us steady.

Jesus advises us to build our lives not just on hearing his words, but on putting them into practice. We need more than the name of Jesus—we need a willingness to do what he says, to trust him not just with the future, but to trust him in life right now.



If we hear the words but do not obey what Jesus says, our lives might look good on the surface. But eventually the trials come, and our lives can fall apart, or become unraveled or capsize—choose whichever metaphor you want. The point is that life works best when we do what Jesus says.

Jesus does not force us to obey, but he gives us a choice. He tells us what will happen if we don't. Our behavior shows whether we believe him, and whether we trust him.

Seeking a foundation

If we want a basis of stability in times of trouble, then we need to consult the teachings of Jesus. We should not wait for the storms to begin—we should get right habits right now.

But how do we do that? Wait for Jesus to pop down in our home to tell us what we ought to do? No. In most cases the words of Jesus are already in our homes. What we need to do is to take the initiative to learn what they are, and to do what he says. Don't assume you know, just because you read it a few years ago. If you really want a stable foundation, you need to read it again. You can't build on the right foundation unless you know what it is.

What you learned a few years ago may have been good enough for then, but you have probably forgotten a few things, and you might learn even more, now that you have more life experience. I encourage you: Keep learning—keep growing—keep strengthening your connection with the true foundation of life. No one else can do it for you. □

¹Hebrews 6:18-19

²Matthew 7:24-27

Afraid of God?

Are you a little afraid of God? Do you worry that he has something against you? When I feel that way, it helps me to remember three stories in which God teaches us how he really feels about us.

by
Tammy Tkach

The first is the strange story of the prophet Hosea. God told Hosea to marry a prostitute, so he did. Their marriage produced children, and Hosea loved his wife. She eventually went back to her immoral ways, but despite her unfaithfulness, Hosea didn't stop loving her. Hosea's experience was God's way of illustrating how he never stopped loving his chosen people, even though they repeatedly turned back to idolatry.

The second story is that of the Good Samaritan, who stopped to help a Jew in distress. Samaritans were despised; but in Jesus' parable, the Good Samaritan ignored the history of prejudice and mistreatment to help a man who in other circumstances might have spit in his face. That's just how Jesus feels about me. No matter what I've done, he still loves me, forgives me and takes care of me.

The third story is Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son. The father of the prodigal son didn't wait for his son to drop to his knees, begging and pleading to be taken back, even as a servant. He ran to his son crying, elated to have him back, before his son had even spoken a word.

Sometimes we might think God is much like stern parents or teachers, peering over his reading glasses, looking down his nose at us, waiting for us to sheepishly or desperately admit our sins and ask for all to be forgiven before giving us the "Well, okay, but don't do it again" condescending nod. We might or might not get the ruler on the knuckles before he sends us on our way.

Growing in grace and knowledge means we can put aside our childish notions of a God who thinks and acts

as we humans do. He is not like us; his thoughts and ways are not like ours. He is not a petty, malicious, self-centered being who gets offended when we sin and then peevishly waits for us to crawl to him on bloody knees. Just as in the examples of Hosea, the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, our God loves and forgives us even while we are sinning! Christ died for the ungodly. His love is not conditional, and his forgiveness is ours before we even think to repent.

God wants us to repent. He wants us to be with him and to know we have his forgiveness. Repentance is going to God's throne of grace and being reassured that he never stops loving us. It does not mean drumming up artificial sorrow and begging for a forgiveness we fear we might not get.



God is not holding a grudge and he has not turned away from us. He lovingly awaits those who fall back into old habits, who still feed at the pig troughs, and who in their sins are helpless in a ditch, no matter how long it takes. His love is unending and his grace is never ending. □

Christ, our worship leader

Review 1 of James B. Torrance' book: Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace

Though not a prolific writer like his brother Thomas F Torrance, James B Torrance (often referred to as JB), through a life-long career in university-level teaching, had a profound influence on, perhaps, thousands of students (who in turn influenced many others). In this way, JB made a significant and lasting contribution to the resurgence in our day of the ancient Nicene faith with its confession of an incarnational and Trinitarian theology. Key precepts of JB's teaching are set forth in his book, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*. Here is a summary of its contents from IVP, the book's publisher:

James Torrance points us to the indispensable *who* of worship, the triune God of grace. Worship is the gift of participating through the Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father, writes Torrance. This book explodes the notion that the doctrine of the Trinity may be indispensable for the creed but remote from life and worship. Firmly rooted in Scripture and theology, alive with pastoral counsel and anecdote, Torrance's work shows us just why real Trinitarian theology is the very fiber of Christian confession.

I like to take a comprehensive look, beginning here with the introduction: *Christ, our worship leader*. JB notes that God, who "made all creatures for his glory... made men and women in his own image to be the priests of creation and to express on behalf of all creatures the praises of God." In this priestly role as followers of Jesus we are called to "gather up the worship of all creation". But who among us is righteous and otherwise able enough for this lofty vocation? The answer is that there is but one human who is: the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ, our High Priest. JB comments: "The good news is that God comes to us in Jesus to stand in for us and bring to fulfilment his purposes of worship and communion".

In his vicarious humanity, and through his role as High Priest, Jesus stands in for us, worshipping the Father on our behalf, and on behalf of all creation. Jesus, the Source and Head of all created things (for he created the universe out of nothing, and by his power sustains it), sends the Spirit to form the church to be his body on earth, calling them to be "a royal priesthood offering spiritual sacrifices" in order to join him in his "great priestly work and ministry of intercession". JB summarizes these thoughts with this powerful statement:

Through what is referred to as *the wonderful exchange*, "Christ takes what is ours (our broken lives and unworthy prayers), sanctifies them, offers them without spot or wrinkle to the Father, and gives them back to us, that we might 'feed' upon him in thanksgiving". JB comments further:

by
Ted Johnston

Christian worship is... our participation through the Spirit in the Son's communion with the Father, in his vicarious life of worship and intercession. It is our response to our Father for all that he has done for us in Christ. It is our self-offering in body, mind and spirit, in response to the one true offering made for us in Christ, our response of gratitude (*eucharistia*) to God's grace (*charis*), our sharing by grace in the heavenly intercession of Christ. Therefore, anything we say about worship---the forms of worship, its practises and procedure - must be said in the light of him to whom it is a response. It must be said in the light of the gospel of grace.

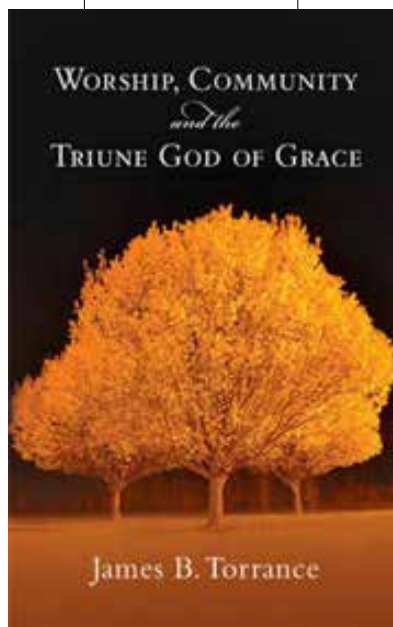
JB challenges us to ask ourselves: Does our worship make the real presence of Christ transparent, or does it obscure his presence? Is it reflective of the triune God of grace, or is it reflective of "the contract God who has to be conditioned into being gracious by what we do"? JB reminds us that the author of Hebrews describes Jesus Christ as the one *Leitourgos*---the "leader of our worship."¹ As JB notes, the book of Hebrews contrasts Jesus' work as lead worshipper under the new covenant with that provided by Israel's priests under the old covenant, noting that Christ's form of worship "gathers up" the worship provided by Israel's worship and "replaces it."

The worship Jesus provides us under the new covenant focuses on baptism and the Lord's Supper (the two sacraments of our faith). And because Christ's worship is our worship, his baptism is our baptism, and

Christ's sacrifice is our sacrifice. Indeed, Jesus' own "righteousness is our righteousness apprehended by faith," and thus we understand that "the real agent of true worship is Jesus Christ" himself. Sadly, this truth is often overlooked (or obscured) in Christian circles. Why? Largely due to a neglect of "the continuing priesthood of Christ". JB comments:

We cannot have a true understanding of worship, prayer, baptism, and the Lord's Supper without a New Testament understanding of the priesthood of Christ. It is he who calls the church into being as a royal priesthood to participate by grace in his continuing ministry, lifting us by the Spirit into the very triune life of God in wonderful communion.

And so JB begins his book clearly establishing the foundation and the means of our worship in the person of Jesus Christ, who by the Spirt leads us in worshipping the Father. We'll see more about this Trinitarian, personalized shape of Christian worship as we proceed through the book.☐



¹Hebrews 8:2

Sayings by Richard Rohr

Until we learn to love others as ourselves, it's difficult to blame broken people who desperately try to affirm themselves when no one else will.

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

Faith is not for overcoming obstacles; it is for experiencing them—all the way through!

The most amazing fact about Jesus, unlike almost any other religious founder, is that he found God in disorder and imperfection—and told us that we must do the same or we would never be content on this earth.

All great spirituality teaches about letting go of what you don't need and who you are not. Then, when you can get little enough and naked enough and poor enough, you'll find that the little place where you really are is ironically more than enough and is all that you need. At that place, you will have nothing to prove to anybody and nothing to protect.

That place is called freedom. It's the freedom of the children of God. Such people can connect with everybody. They don't feel the need to eliminate anybody.

Let's state it clearly: One great idea of the biblical revelation is that God is manifest in the ordinary, in the actual, in the daily, in the now, in the concrete incarnations of life, and not through purity codes and moral achievement contests, which are seldom achieved anyway.

The most common one-liner in the Bible is, "Do not be afraid." Someone counted, and it occurs 365 times.

When you get your, 'Who am I?' question right, all of your, 'What should I do?' questions tend to take care of themselves.

The cross solved our problem by first revealing our real problem, our universal pattern of scapegoating and sacrificing others. The cross exposes forever the scene of our crime.

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

Life is not a matter of creating a special name for ourselves, but of uncovering the name we have always had.

Because I am a part of the Big Picture, I do matter and substantially so. Because I am only a part, however, I am rightly situated off to stage right—and happily so. What freedom there is in such truth! We are inherently important and included, yet not burdened with manufacturing or sustaining that private importance. Our dignity is given by God, and we are freed from ourselves!

The Perennial Tradition recognizes there is a Divine Reality underneath and inherent in the world of things; there is in the human soul a natural capacity, similarity, and longing for this Divine Reality; the final goal of existence is union with this Divine Reality.

Jesus didn't come to create a new or exclusive religion. He came to reform and re-invigorate the very meaning of all religion—and ground it in human nature and creation itself—which is universal.

If it is the truth, it is true all the time and everywhere, and sincere lovers of truth will take it wherever it comes from. If it is true, it is common domain, and "there for the mind to see in the things that God has made.

What we seek is what we are, which is exactly why Jesus says that we *will* find it (Matthew 7:7-8). God is never an object to be found or possessed as we find other objects, but *the One who shares our own deepest subjectivity*—or our "self."

We must finally go back to the ultimate Christian source for our principle—the central doctrine of the Trinity itself. Yes, God is "One," just as our Jewish ancestors taught us (Deuteronomy 6:4), and yet the further, more subtle level of meaning is that this *oneness* is actually the radical love union between *three* completely distinct "persons" of the Trinity. The basic principle and problem of "the one and the many" has been overcome in God's very nature. God is a mystery of *relationship*, and in its deepest form this relationship is called love. The three are not uniform at all—but quite distinct—and yet completely *oned* in mutual self-emptying and infinite outpouring. God, and all of creation, is a mystery of relationship!

We humans are not autonomous beings either; though we are seemingly separate, we are radically one, too, just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one. We really are created in God's "image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26), much more than we ever imagined. Trinity is our universal template for the nature of reality and for how to reconcile unity and diversity at every level.

We are not seeking some naïve "everything is one"; rather, we seek much more: the deeper "unity of the Spirit which was given us all to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:13). We must study, pray, wait, reconcile, and work to achieve true unity—not an impossible uniformity, which was the tragic mistake of both the early notion of Christendom and a later notion of Communism.

Julian of Norwich says, "The love of God creates in us such a *oneing* that when it is truly seen, no person can separate themselves from another person," and "In the sight of God all humans are oned, and one person is all people and all people are in one person."

This is not some 21st century flabby fabrication. This is not pantheism or mere New Age optimism. This is the whole point; it was, indeed, supposed to usher in a "new age" (Matthew 19:28)—and it still can, and will. This is the Perennial Tradition. Our job is not to discover it, but only to retrieve what has been discovered—and lost—and rediscovered again and again, in the mystics and seers, and prophets of all religions.

The Plain Truth Magazine



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