

THE **Plain Truth** ASIA

PP 12578/3/2006 A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Feb-Mar 2006

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

ISSN 1675-3100



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Human rights or the right to be human?

How do we react when we hear of or see a fellow human being abused? No one can say that they haven't come across any such cases. In the world's political arena, a lot of tension has been created recently when accusations of the torture of terrorist suspects at secret prisons were directed at the United States. The ongoing trial of Saddam Hussein in Iraq has heard many witnesses describing horrifying scenarios of the most unimaginable brutality inflicted upon innocent people.

Many of us have read of the Killing Fields in Cambodia under the Pol Pot regime and history records the murder of millions of Jews in the Holocaust during World War II. Why is it that human beings continue to be brutal to one another even to this day? Why are we incapable of changing even though we shudder at the historical records of such abuse? Today, if given the means, there are leaders of nations who would use weapons of mass destruction to further their own interests. Some hope that they can annihilate an entire race or nation, while others would hope for the destruction of humans who are of a different religion or belief. Many individuals are living in fear and oppression because they follow a different creed or faith from their fellow human beings. Even to this day there are people losing their lives because of religious differences. It seems that our propensity for killing or butchery has not subsided even though technologically we have reached dizzying heights.

There has been much said and argued about human rights. Many individuals have fought for the rights of people to be free to express themselves and also the freedom to live as they choose. Today there are even those who are championing the rights of gays and lesbians. Does 'human rights' mean that we have the right to live as we please without any restrictions? The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed a Universal Declaration of Human

Rights. Article 1 of this declaration states:

'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.' Unfortunately, many human beings themselves do not consider others as having the same dignity as themselves. Certainly, there are those who will not project any spirit of brotherhood towards those who differ from them. This happens not only among nations but among ordinary peoples



in all walks of life. How many women and children are abused daily in this world? How could unscrupulous individuals who force women into prostitution go on to proclaim their belief in any dignity for others in their society? What spirit of brotherhood are we showing when millions are starving in poor nations? And what respect of human dignity or reason and conscience is there when a new born baby is found dumped in a rubbish pile? There is something sorely missing in our perception and fulfilment of what we consider human rights. What is missing is that we have not included God in our quest for human rights.

Jesus Christ the Saviour of all mankind, part of the Godhead himself, taught another perspective to life. For Him there is a different

priority in order for life to be lived to its fullest and purest potential. He placed reverence to God before anything else when He stated that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul and with all our mind.¹ This He considered the first and great commandment. Following this He brought into focus what should follow a sincere love for God, that is, to love our neighbour as ourselves.² To love our neighbour means to love all human beings irrespective of their nationality, race or colour. But for this to become reality, humanity must first learn itself to acknowledge and receive the love of God. Only then are we able to love other people unconditionally. On the contrary, sin has entwined itself into human existence. This is why all our efforts to bring about human rights have failed. And so we need to receive the right to be human as God intended first.

That right comes only through Jesus Christ whom God sent to free mankind from the grips of sin.³ Christ gave His life as a ransom for our sins thereby giving us a way out from the evil which engulfs us, into the reality of what being human is all about—how God intended human beings to be. With God as a very real and constant presence in our lives, we begin to understand what it means to co-exist with other humans in a peaceful and loving manner because this is made possible by the presence of God's Holy Spirit in our lives. The Spirit of God will teach and bring us to respect and love one another. This love of God transcends all barriers and enables the true spirit of brotherhood, as mentioned in the United Nations definition of human rights, to be fully realised. The means to understand true human rights is available in the Bible. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a fine place to begin, for when we understand what it means to be human then human rights will be made quite plain. □

¹ Matthew 22: 37

² Matthew 22: 39

³ John 3: 16

THE Plain Truth ASIA

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding



Issue No. 5	Volume No. 4
February–March 2006	PP 12578/3/2006
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The Plain Truth Asia is published five times a year as funds allow, and is sponsored by the Worldwide Church of God Malaysia, which is a member of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia. It follows a non-denominational editorial policy and provides a message of practical help, hope and encouragement from a Christian perspective.

- For Non-Muslims Only -

DONATIONS: Although we do not put any subscription price for the Plain Truth Asia, we gratefully welcome donations from readers who support our desire to bring spiritual knowledge and understanding to our increasingly secular society. Cheques should be made payable to 'Worldwide Church of God' and sent to the addresses listed above.

Designed and prepared by the British and Malaysian PT offices.
Printed in Malaysia by
DI Print Solutions Sdn Bhd/Imagescan Creative Sdn Bhd.

ISSN 1675-3100. Copyright Worldwide Church of God, 2006.

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What our readers say:

THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA has useful articles and the layout and pictures are good.
P Tevaraji
Petaling Jaya

The articles are encouraging, enlightening and informative (it provides us with information from all over the world).
Ooi Sin Yee
Subang Jaya

The magazine has certain articles that help me to understand more about life as it is.
Lee Hung Yen
Kuala Lumpur

THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA gives me a better understanding of the Christian faith and a deeper understanding of God's way of life.
Julia Ann Percival
Kuala Lumpur

The articles in THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA reveal a lot of interesting topics relating to human relationship with God as well as the truth of human nature.
Victor Liew Choon Leong
Petaling Jaya

The articles in THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA are not only refreshing but very uplifting too.
Mrs. H Saigal
Kuala Lumpur

The articles are well researched. Historical perspective of the Bible is always fascinating and presented in simple language yet interesting.
Steven Tee
Kuala Lumpur

THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA improved my spiritual life, increased my knowledge and helped me know more about God's love.
Lim Hup Keng
Shah Alam

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA helpful. Being a Hindu, I have many relatives and friends who are of the Christian



faith. As such, I have the desire to learn all about Christianity in order to understand my Christian friends and relatives so as to live with them in harmony and love.
N Mahadevan
Kuala Lumpur

Through THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA we can learn the new way of life and world history. Each and everyone must read this magazine.
SSS Maniam
Kuala Lumpur

THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA helps me to understand the word of God, the basic doctrines and it is an encouragement in my work.
Stephen Low Kaa Siong
Petaling Jaya

We can learn lessons from some of the articles with scriptures. They are very helpful in leading me to get a better understanding of God and His ways and how to know Him better.
David Wong
Petaling Jaya

It contains a lot of articles that are thought provoking, helpful and relevant to today's life.
Judy Lee
Subang Jaya

THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA is very informative and practical in our daily lives!
T Janemary
Klang

I am greatly impressed by the good works of THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA through which God's word is powerfully illuminated. Though the articles are written with contemporary expressions making it more readable and easily understood, not a single truth has been altered even to the slightest degree. Each article has a profound effect on my life and reminds me that the most important aspect of the Christian life is our personal relationship with Christ. It is my

earnest prayer that THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA is able to sustain its good works through the contributions from various sources.
Peggy Wong
Petaling Jaya

THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA is very informative and it has helped me in my spiritual growth. The witnessing of the readers touched my heart and contributed to my changes. It is the truth and nothing but the truth about Christ, the word of God and his message to the world for the believers as well as non-believers.
A Rajeswary
Kepong

THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA covers a wide range of subjects. The articles are very useful, informative, motivating and challenging, for example: "Can you Handle Disappointment?"
Librarian
Kuala Lumpur

THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA is enlightening, relevant, inspirational and reassuring.
Dr. Mah Peh Yong
Kuala Lumpur

The articles are objective yet personal. The writing style is direct and the language used is simple. Keep up the good work!
Lam Kee Soon
Subang Jaya

The articles on family life are useful, helpful and at times thought provoking.
R Muthia
Kuala Lumpur

Although THE PLAIN TRUTH ASIA is sent free of charge, it is not without cost. Each copy is made possible by the generosity of others. So we are very grateful for those readers who send a donation, and make it possible for us to continue to publish the good news of the Gospel.

Giving as a way of life

JH: Your focus is not so much on making donations as organising your whole life around using your possessions and resources in a generous way.

MV: Yes, you have to make generosity a way of life. It isn't just money—it is your time, your talents and everything about you. All these must be considered as potential for worship through generosity—to demonstrate your love for God and your neighbor. You have to plan for that. You can't have this great aspiration for generosity and then spend 103 per cent of your income on yourself. You have to decide to organize your life around generosity. You need to spend less than you earn so that you can have peace of mind, and the time and the inclination to help someone in unfortunate circumstances.

JH: Is this as a philosophy rather than a program?

MV: Yes. God has been generous toward the world, and as a part of God's family I am going to make my life a life of generosity, and I'll make my decisions with that in mind. Everyone's circumstances are different—so you can't legislate a formula.

JH: But surely generosity is a responsibility and not just an option for a Christian?

MV: I prefer *characteristic* rather than *responsibility*. If I am a Christian, if I have embraced God's gift of grace for me, and I know he is not holding my sins against me—when I realise what I have been given—then generosity is going to overflow.

JH: If we were to respond with generosity to everyone with a good cause, we would soon be in need ourselves. How do we

draw the line?

MV: I have a formula. It is to think where your greatest joy intersects with the needs of the world. In that crossroad we need to find a sustainable capacity for generosity. It is where I should focus my gifts and my generosity. It is a natural extension of the way God has created me.

Choose a charity or charities where you feel empathy—where you want to make a difference. Then, if someone asks: "Would you like to give



**John Halford
interviews
Mark
Vincent
of
Design for
Ministry**



to this organisation," you can say: "Here's where my interests are. Here's where I am already giving. And here is where I can continue to grow in my giving." And someone else is going to have another priority. Then you can have peace about giving what you can, and you don't have to feel guilty about what you say no to.

JH: Giving should not be a guilt trip then?

MV: No. If I get you to give out of guilt or fear, which is where a lot of fund-raising appeals are rooted, then the only way I am going to get you to give again is to make you feel guilty, or afraid or angry again.

JH: When talking or writing about giving, you use the word *sustainable*. Can you define it in the context of giving?

MV: Many of us can't afford to give because we have spent all our money on consumer items. So when it comes time to give, we have nothing. We should organise our resources so that giving is not haphazard, but an anticipated and budgeted part of our expenses. God in Christ has given us himself, and because of that we have hope. Now he asks us to give ourselves so that others might know him too.

JH: It seems that the poor are more generous than those who are better off. What can we learn from this?

MV: The poor are more likely to give more often and also a higher percentage. They don't have any pretense that they can survive on their own. They know the value of small amounts. They know that they must depend on God and each other. The rich feel they are in control of their circumstances.

It is important to gain control of your resources. But not so that you become self-sufficient. It is a serious spiritual mistake to ever feel you are self-sufficient. Jesus reminds us to be careful about the deceitfulness of riches, which can be as much a spiritual hazard as to be overwhelmed by the cares of this world. We all—rich and poor—owe our very existence to God's grace and generosity. □

Is the Bible relevant

Is the Bible relevant in the modern world? It is a fair question. Since the Bible is a book that was completed almost 2,000 years ago, does it really address issues which relate to you and me? Consider the following:

Relationships

Do you know that God is great on relationships? He made the first move in building a bridge between the human race and the Eternal God. Jesus, who is that bridge, was slain from the foundation of the earth so that our sins would be forgiven, and we can have direct access to God's heavenly throne. God chooses to work from within us even though we are imperfect, and offers us the opportunity to have a lasting relationship with Him. The essence of relationships is sharing and caring.¹ The Bible reveals how this relationship works, and provides the environment for God to nurture us towards eternal life. The Bible also shows us that we need to build right relationships with our neighbours be they our parents, spouse, children, employers, colleagues or employees.²

Spiritual nourishment

Have you ever thought of the Bible as a provider of the spiritual food we

by
Ben David

need daily? Without this source, we would not be able to 'sustain' the spiritual life that is growing within us, whether we think we are infants or mature believers.³ By studying the Bible daily, meditating on its teachings, and applying them in our lives, the Word of God becomes internalised. It then forms an integral part of our thought, faith and practice.

Spiritual armour

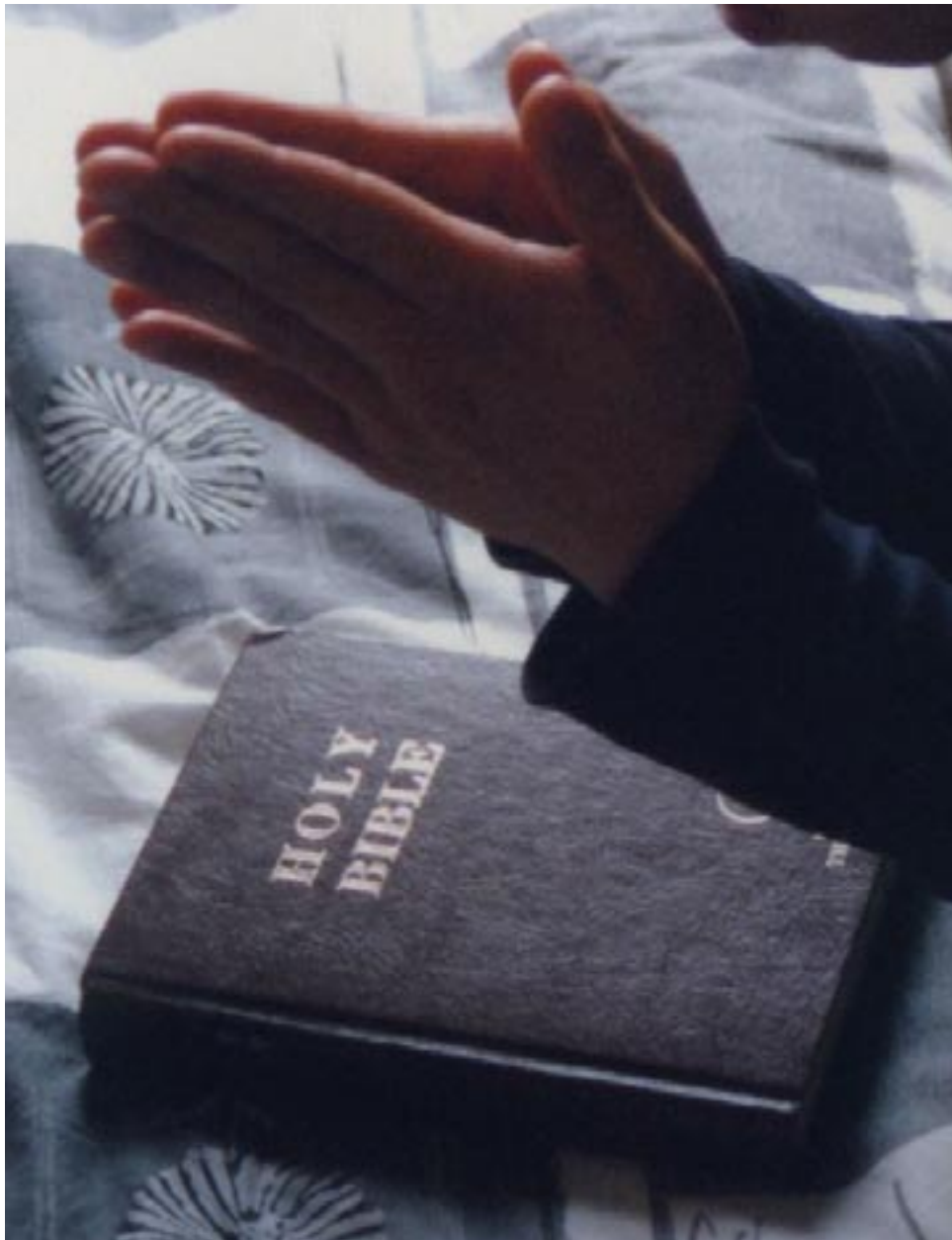
Have you thought of the Word of God as the *sword* of the Holy Spirit? It is part of our spiritual defence to help us fulfil God's purpose in us. God calls us to become holy and a place of residence for His eternal Spirit.⁴ Regular Bible study strengthens us against our own unpredictable human nature, this 'fallen' world and the sly Satan.

Seeking God's will

The Bible is a soul-searching document designed to help us see what we truly are.⁵ We can use it to seek God's will and it provides us with the answers that Jesus alone can provide. Whether we seek the answers to life's questions, or principles to live by, the Bible remains the sole authoritative choice channel of communication between God and humankind. To know these answers is the greatest adventure of life.

Living by Faith

Is your life built entirely around the things that you see? If so, then the Bible is for you! You see, the Bible is a book of faith. God has faith in us!⁶ Bible Study helps us to build the faith we need in daily living so that we can experience the quality of life God



levant today?

wants for us. Building a right relationship with God leads to true freedom, joy and peace. When we study His Word, we see the faith He expresses through Jesus. Jesus gave everything He had in exchange for our spiritual life.⁷ We see the faith expressed by people throughout history who served God based on His Word alone. They looked to His promises, recorded for you and me. Regular Bible study helps us build the faith and love we need to fight sin and experience salvation as Christ is formed in us.

Here are some ideas that can help you to study the Bible effectively:

Set aside time.

Make regular Bible study a habit.

Schedule into

your busy life certain periods that are dedicated to studying God's Word. Be hungry for the food God offers!⁸ We need His spiritual nourishment daily. Time spent in studying God's Word is an investment in eternal life.

Pray before studying.

Ask God to give you a humble and teachable attitude so that you are willing to learn from one of God's greatest resources and gifts. Ask him to give you the mind that Jesus had. The Word of God was designed to instruct, encourage, nourish and educate us to experience a 'paradigm' shift—but only if we are willing clay in the hands of the Master Potter.⁹



Take God at His word!

Begin by believing that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. Take God at his word. He says to trust Him to keep His promises as He cannot lie and is committed to seeing His plan through in your life. Act on what God says and begin to experience His work in your life.

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. God can teach and reveal to us what He wants each of us to know. He can speak through His Word to our hearts, and our conscience.¹⁰

Let the Bible interpret itself

The Scriptures can be cross-referenced so that we can understand them better. They are not of private interpretation.¹¹ Bible

¹ Matthew 25: 34–40

² Ephesians 5 and 6

³ Hebrews 5:13–14

⁴ Ephesians 6:17; 1:4; 2:22

⁵ Hebrews 4:12

⁶ Hebrews 11:6, 39–40

⁷ Galatians 2:20

⁸ Matthew 5:6

⁹ Isaiah 64:8

¹⁰ Hebrews 4: 12–13;

Psalms 139: 23–24

¹¹ 2 Peter 1: 20

¹² 1 Corinthians 10:11

¹³ John 15:7–8

¹⁴ Acts 17:11

helps can be useful, but only to guide us into what is already clear and consistent in the Bible. The more we study the Bible with God's lead, the more we can see how God is working out His plan and will.

Meditate on God's Word

Think about each verse, passage or topic under study. Meditation includes reflecting on what God is teaching us through Scripture, the lessons we can draw on, and how we can internalise and apply these lessons.¹² Living God's Word makes the Bible come alive. In the final analysis, Bible study should produce the kind of fruits Jesus is looking for in our lives.¹³

Journal it!

Write down your own notes each time you study the Bible. Keep a journal outlining your thoughts and the areas where God's Word can become part of your life. Use it as part of your Christian experience and journey. Your journal can prove to be an invaluable aid. It can, for example, strengthen your prayer life, help you conduct periodical reviews on your own growth and understanding when you meditate on how God Himself has journeyed with you.

The Bible is indeed relevant for you and me today. Let us study it with zeal as the Bereans did.¹⁴ I can assure you that it will certainly benefit you. Would you like to take up this unique adventure to explore the words of the Almighty God? ☐

Do you want

Turner (not his real name) might have been in his forties, fifties or even sixties. Like many of us today he probably lived a careless life. Tragedy struck him one day and he became incapacitated. He was in this condition for 38 years. His family members probably had sought the medical fraternity for cures but were not successful. Turner's hope for a happy life was shattered. He probably felt that he was a burden to his family. The family might have also been burnt out looking after him day after day. Call it fate. What could he do? He was helpless.

Turner still had a glimmer of hope. In Jerusalem where he lived there was a pool called Bethesda whose water some claimed had supernatural healing power. They believed that angels appeared at the pool from time to time and stirred up the water and whoever went into the pool *first* would be cured of his or her infirmity. Presumably only one person got healed at each stirring up of the water. It was survival of the fittest—the one who got into the water first was presumably healed. And because of this belief many left their invalid relatives at the side of the pool in the hope that they would get a chance to get into the pool and get healed. It was just a superstition—nobody really knew for sure if anyone was actually healed.

Like many other invalids, Turner was waiting patiently for an opportune time to get into the pool first at the stirring of the water. However, there was no one to help him get into the pool. Whenever the water was stirred up, somebody would pre-empt him and he would miss the opportunity. It was hit-and-miss kind of thing, and his waiting was futile.

Just when all hope was gone, something unexpected happened that changed Turner's life. Jesus Christ was travelling to Jerusalem to attend a feast and he happened to pass by this pool. When he saw this helpless man he was moved with compassion. He asked him, "Do you want to get well?" The man said that



**by
Dr. P.
Sellappan**

he had no one to put him into the water so that he could be healed. Poor Turner! Christ saw his pitiful condition and told him, "Rise, take up your mat, and walk". He was instantaneously and miraculously healed. He didn't do anything to receive that healing. You can read the full story in the Gospel of John, chapter 5, verses 1 to 16.

Lessons from the story

Realise our need for healing.

Jesus asked Turner an obvious question: "Do you want to get well?" This pointed question made him more aware of his infirmity. He needed healing. Like Turner, we too must recognize our sinful condition and realise our helplessness unless we seek God for healing.

Rely on God, not superstitions.

Superstitious belief led Turner to the pool. But it didn't work for him. What about us? Do we believe in astrology, palmistry, crystal-gazing and witchcraft for our healing? Like Turner, we too must go to God to receive healing of the mind and the soul. Doctors can only fix some of our physical infirmities, not our spiritual problems. Only God can fix our spiritual problems.

Healing is by choice.

There was no mass healing at the pool. Out of so many, only Turner was healed. Christ didn't go round healing everyone. He healed this man because he wanted to be healed. It's the same today. God won't heal us unless we really want it. It is a choice that you and I have to make. We need to individually seek God for healing. There is no such thing as universal salvation.

Don't go back to the previous state.

Christ told Turner to take up his mat and leave that place so that he would not be tempted to go back. It's the same with God's calling. Once we accept God's kindness and mercy, we don't want to go back to our former way of life—the

bondage that we were in. We don't want to be like Lot's wife who turned back and died.¹ We must burn the bridges and not go back to our former way of life.

Be willing to appear foolish.

Christ told Turner to take up his mat and walk in the streets of Jerusalem (like a vagabond). It was an embarrassing task to carry a mat and walk around in a big metropolis. He would have preferred an executive brief case to a dirty mat! But he wasn't embarrassed; he obeyed Christ's command.

Because the gospel is radically different from what we have heard or known, it appears foolish to people. For example, when we tell people that God came in the flesh to pay the penalty of our sins, that we are holy people, that we are children of God and that we will be resurrected at Christ's second coming and given eternal life, we appear foolish to people. In 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 18, the apostle Paul writes, "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God". Even the Roman King Agrippa told the apostle Paul that he was out of his mind—mad—because he was preaching such 'foolish' things.²

Be willing to use whatever evangelistic tool God provides.

Turner was given a mat (an unimpressive tool) to proclaim the gospel to the people—to tell what God has done for him. What about us? Most of us don't have much money, status, qualifications or oratorical skills to proclaim the gospel. But we can share the gospel using whatever tools that God has given us—be it our humble home, neighbourhood or limited skills and abilities. It is God who empowers us to share the gospel and witness to people.

to get well?

Be willing to go against the norm.
Just like Turner, when we accept Christ's healing, we must be willing to go against the norm. We must be willing to 'turn the other cheek', love our enemies, do good and pray for them, lend to needy people without expecting anything in return, forgive others, and run the extra mile. These are not the things that normal people do. It takes divine character to go against the norm.

Be prepared to give an answer.
Turner had to answer the authorities why he was carrying a mat on a Sabbath which according to them was not lawful. So he had to tell them about Christ and how he intervened and healed him. He was simply obeying Christ's command to take up his mat and walk. He was giving an answer—a defence—to all those who asked him how he got healed.³ He proclaimed Jesus as one who could heal. We too must be willing to defend our faith and proclaim our Saviour who alone gives us real hope.

Be prepared to be persecuted.
According to the Old Testament rules, the man could be stoned to death for breaking the Sabbath. It is the same today. Proclaiming Jesus Christ as God and what He has done for us could invite persecution. For example, when Christ raised dead Lazarus from the tomb, the Jews plotted to kill not only Christ but also Lazarus because his 'healing' testified that Christ was indeed God for He had power over death.⁴

Be willing to change your lifestyle.
Christ told Turner, "Sin no more". Presumably his infirmity came about because of his sinful lifestyle. So Christ told him to change his lifestyle—to overcome his sinful attitudes like greed, selfishness,



envy, wrath and pride. He needed to crucify the old self and put on Christ's attitude and mind. Like Turner, once healed, we too must put away our former corrupt lifestyle. Even though the new life may be tough and challenging, we can trust Christ to walk with us in our spiritual journey. He promises to give us the power of the Holy Spirit to help us live a God-centred lifestyle.

Conclusion

Turner had no hope but Christ intervened and healed him. He gave him a new lease of life. This new life brought new challenges such as adapting to a new environment, rebuilding relationships with his family and friends, finding a job, and living and sharing the gospel message.

Like Turner, we too need healing of the mind, soul and body. Although doctors can fix some of our physical infirmities, we need to go to God for our spiritual or inner healing. Most of our problems are spiritual in nature and therefore require spiritual solutions. We cannot put our trust in some superstitious beliefs for our inner healing. We need to go to Jesus Christ who alone can forgive our sins and heal all our hurts. He offers real healing.

Unlike at the pool at Bethesda where only one person got healed when the water was stirred up (if that was true), God has unlimited power, love and compassion to heal anyone who would come to Him. He is waiting to give you the healing water—the Holy Spirit—so that you can

receive inner healing. It will give you life-transforming power to help you live this new way of life. You don't have to live a crippled life—a life full of frustration and unhappiness—any more. God has already stirred up this life-giving water—the Holy Spirit—and is even now waiting for your response. The same God who healed Turner is gently asking you and me, "Do you want to get well?" I do, don't you? ☐

¹ Genesis 19:26

² Acts 26:12–29

³ 1 Peter 3:15

⁴ John 12:9–10

Does God h

Some groups teach that God is a being who is composed of a physical, corporeal body—a body made of flesh and bone. This idea is not supported by the Bible. Groups that teach this rely on their interpretation of such passages as Genesis 1:26, in which God says “let us make man in our image.”

They also point to passages in which God or His actions are

described in human terms. They take such passages literally rather than in a metaphorical way, thus attributing body parts to God. Exodus 33:11 is one example, where we read that, “The Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friends.” Some other examples are Genesis 3:8; Exodus 33:20, 22–23; 34:5; Deuteronomy 23:14; Ezekiel 1:27, 8:2; Habakkuk 3:3–4.

Thirdly, *anthropomorphites*—those who teach that God has a body—make their claim on the basis that the second Person of the Godhead, the Son of God, was a human being during His incarnate state.

As we proceed, we’ll briefly examine each of these ideas to see why they do not teach the idea that God has a body. But first, let us see what the Bible says about God’s nature and being. In John 4:24, we read, “God is spirit, and His worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.” Here Jesus states clearly that God is spirit. Since God is spirit, He does not have a body. By nature, God must be an incorporeal

by
Paul Kroll

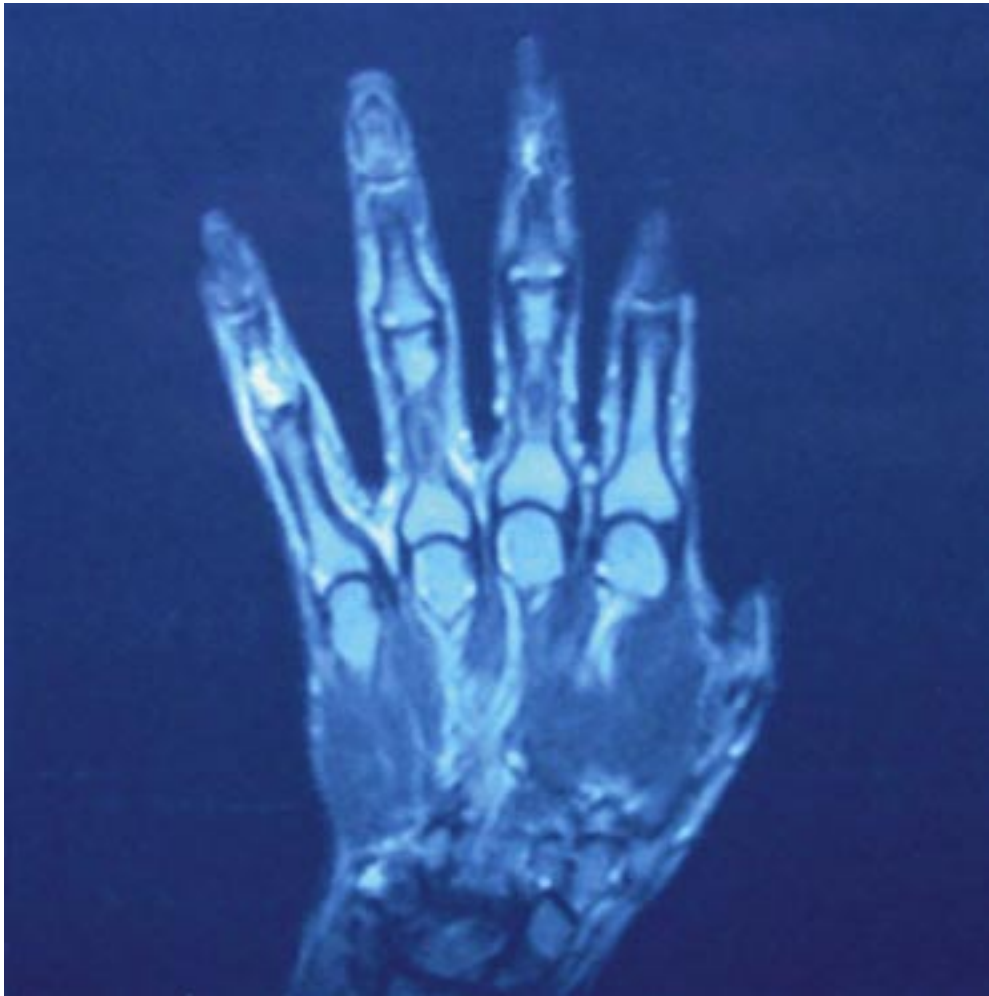
being, and not be limited to existing within a certain size and shape. We should point out that the scripture says God is spirit, not that He has a spirit. Since He is spirit, He lacks parts or a body, entirely.

Jesus Himself defined what spirit is—and pointed out that it is different from a human, physical body. After His resurrection, He told His disciples, “Touch me

In 1 Timothy 6:15–16 we are told that God “alone is immortal and Who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.” Not only is God invisible, but He exists in pure light, not something that would be possible for a flesh and bone body to do.

It is certainly true that God in Christ became incarnate and came to exist as a human being, with a

real body. Also, this body, now in a glorified state, continues to exist. However, this is true only of the Son, and only after His incarnation. Since God has existed eternally, and neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit became incarnate—and since the Son throughout eternity was (and continues to be) spirit, the obvious conclusion is that God does not have a body as part of His nature as God. That is to say, a bodily state is not the state in which God has existed from eternity. God has existed in eternity as pure



and see; a ghost [Greek, *pneuma*, ‘spirit’] does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”¹ A spirit does not have flesh and bones. God is spoken of as being invisible, that is, God in His glory does not exist in a body that has shape, as a person who has flesh and bone does. (Please see Colossians 1:15, Romans 1:19–20 and 1 Timothy 1:17).

spirit, even though in the Son, He chose to take on human nature in addition to His non-corporeal nature.

The Son in His incarnate state as Jesus took on the form of a human being. We read in Philippians 2:5–8 that “Jesus Christ: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself

ave a body?

nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross.” He did not have a body in eternity past—He had to take on this form.

The book of John is a confirmation of the fact that Jesus existed as God in a glorified state before His incarnation—before becoming a human being (John 1: 1, 14). He became flesh—He was not already flesh. God took on the form of a human being in His Son, Jesus Christ, in order to communicate directly with us and to complete our redemption.

What of those passages that seem to speak of God in human terms? Those are called anthropomorphisms, that is, descriptions of God’s being, actions and emotions put in human terms. Though God is without a body, His acts for His people are said to be by “His mighty arm”². God is also pictured as having a face, hands, fingers and a back (Psalm 27:8; 10:12; 88:5; Deuteronomy 9: 10; Exodus 33:23). Also, God is described as talking, walking, laughing, and weeping. Such anthropomorphisms are poetic symbols or metaphors representing that which would otherwise be indescribable, because God in His being is invisible and unknown. Such symbols of God’s being are condescensions to us—put in words that we can understand. We have to have some ways of describing God’s relationship to

us. The only way this can occur is through symbols that are understandable to our finite minds and experience.

Consider that it would be logically impossible for God to be a six-foot-four inch (or whatever height and weight) individual with a body of flesh and bone. Unless God were a hermaphrodite—having both male and female sexual organs—the scripture that is sometimes cited as ‘proof’ of God

the universe, as we humans are. Yet, precisely the opposite is said of God—that the universe cannot contain Him³.

Literal anthropomorphism, as mentioned earlier, makes God in our image and forgets that we are made in His image—which has reference not to shape, size or composition, but to something of His spiritual qualities. Human beings have been given the ability to reason and to express many divine qualities, such as communication, invention and the creation of new things, but only from existing materials. God has also given humanity dominion and stewardship over His creation, which shows humanity’s place as ruler and king, much like God. This is the meaning of God creating us “in His own image,” not that God is like human beings in having bodily parts and shape.

Paul explains that literal anthropomorphism is a dangerous and pagan doctrine that we should avoid. He explains what happened in human philosophy and religion: “For

although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles”⁴ □



having a human-shaped body—would be reduced to an absurdity. Genesis 1:27 has God saying that He created both males and females in His image.

The nature and size of the universe itself tells us that it would be impossible that a God made in the image of human beings could create, maintain and control the universe. How could God, as a human-sized being, direct a universe of 10–12 billion light years across? He would be incomprehensibly dwarfed by

¹ Luke 24:39

² Exodus 15:16

³ 2 Chronicles 2:6

⁴ Romans 1:21–23

A lesson ab

That day when evening came, He said to His disciples, "Let us go over to the other side."...

A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.

He said to His disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"¹

The crises of life have often been compared to stormy seas. They come upon us whether we like it or not. They terrify us. They knock us

**by
Michael
Feazell**

around and threaten to destroy all our stability and security. We don't know whether we can survive them. And we don't know how long they will last. At least, that's how a storm at sea would be for most of us. For Jesus, it was just a chance to grab 40 winks.

As Mark tells the story, the disciples were terrified that the boat was going to break up and everyone would die. But Jesus was asleep (on a cushion no less, Mark notes, adding to the contrast between Jesus' tranquillity and the disciples' panic), apparently oblivious to their impending doom. They rouse Him and cry, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?"² Of

course, Jesus quiets the storm with a word, but then He chides the disciples: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"³

Some of the lessons in the story are obvious. Jesus has power over the storms of life, experiences them alongside us, loves us, saves us from them and wants us to trust Him more than we do.

Let's look at a lesson that might not be so obvious. Storms don't worry Jesus. He's right there with us during them, but He's perfectly calm about them. He isn't terrified; He isn't impatient; He isn't worried. In fact, He's so calm, He's asleep. To us, He seems to be asleep at the switch. We wonder why on



Photo: Marvin Nauman / FEMA

out storms



Photo: Win Henderson / FEMA

earth He doesn't get up and do something. We start to wonder whether He even knows the trouble we're in. Whether He cares. Whether He even can do anything about it. Whether He's really all He's cracked up to be.

Like the disciples, we believe he's there. In the disciples' case, they could actually see him lying there asleep. We don't have that luxury. We believe He's there, but most of the time He seems just as asleep as He was during the storm that day on the Sea of Galilee. The psalmist had the same lament in Psalm 44: 23–24: "Awake, O Lord! Why do

you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?"

Maybe that's why Mark included this story. The not-so-obvious lesson is that Jesus was just as much in control, and the disciples were just as safe in His hands, while He was asleep as while He was awake. Most of the time, life seems like a relentless voyage from one storm to the next. At least it does for me, and I expect it's the same for you. One thing I've learned about myself is that during storms I'm usually a scared rabbit

just like Jesus' disciples were.

But I'm also learning that I can take heart in knowing that Jesus isn't scared, and He isn't depressed. He might be asleep, or He might not be, but either way, like the song says, "He's got the whole world in his hands." Even if He doesn't wake up and quiet the storm, I'm safe with Him. And if He does wake up and quiet the storm, He's probably going to say: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

And I can live with that. □

¹ Mark 4:35–40

² Mark 4:38

³ Mark 4:40

Racism transgresses

There is a scourge of mankind which, despite the best intentions of many sound-minded men and women, appears to be worsening in the world today. This scourge is insidious, often unrecognised and not acknowledged, and yet it divides races and countries, it causes unrest and social disorder, it polarises people against others, and it violates the most fundamental respect human beings should have one for another. For Christians this scourge is more—it is sin because it violates the Golden Rule. And, in fact, it is a violation for nearly all religious peoples the world around. This scourge is racism.

What is racism?

Racism is the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over another. It leads one race to dominate another, to reserve the best for itself. It stems from and leads to an attitude of prejudice and intolerance, all based on nothing more than a real or perceived racial difference. Inevitably it leads to discrimination and injustice.

Forms of racism

Racism exists in different forms:

- Individual Racism—Individual acts or behaviour which overtly reflect racist beliefs and attitudes. These can include intentional verbal abuses, slights and taunts, or humiliating jokes.
- Systematic and institutional racism—Racial prejudices supported by institutional power and authority at organizational and structural level. This can include discriminating behaviour in ways which disadvantage minority ethnic people or communities of different races.
- Cultural Racism—Value and belief system which allow or support discriminatory actions against ethno-culturally marginalized communities, whether of the same or different races.

Racism history

Racism has an infamous past. History records the exploitation, suppression, oppression, subjugation, and the systematic atrocities, violence, even wholesale slaughter meted out to slaves, indigenous people and others during the era of slave trade, colonialism and imperialism. The Second World War records the horror of the Nazi holocaust. Hitler enforced a cruel, racist regime in Germany and its conquered territories. And in recent times, there have been the racially or culturally motivated massacres, genocide and ethnic cleansing which occurred in Cambodia under Pol Pot's regime, in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo.

Despite the outcry against racism, and notwithstanding a United Nations' Declaration on the elimination of racial discrimination in all its forms, racism nevertheless persists and is, in fact, much alive and well in many societies around the world today!

Darwinism and racial superiority/inferiority

How did Darwinism affect the belief in racial superiority or inferiority particularly in Western countries?

Prior to Charles Darwin, a British Naturalist (1809–1882), up until the middle of the 19th century, nearly all Westerners, including scientists, believed the Judeo-Christian teaching that God created humankind; that all people on earth were descendents of Adam and Eve, thus having a common ancestry.

Owing, however, to the widespread acceptance of Darwin's evolution theory expounded in his book, "On the origin of species" published in 1859, many Western scientists and intellectuals found support for ideas supporting racial superiority.

The Theory of Evolution postulates that complex life forms evolved from simple life forms,



by
**Yong
Chin Gee**

including human beings. As far as human beings are concerned, his theory postulates that human beings evolved from many species of primates; therefore, the races today are fundamentally different due to different ancestry. Darwin came to believe that some races were inferior to others because of evolution. He stated that one of the strongest evidence for evolution was the existence of living primitive races, evolutionarily surviving between the 'civilised races of man' and the gorilla.

Dr. Hermann Klaatsch (1802–1871), a prominent German evolutionist, concluded that the black races evolved from gorillas, the white races from the chimpanzees, and the oriental races from orangutans.

Robert Chambers (1802–1871), an English historical, scientific writer in his book, "Vestiges of the natural History of Creation," wrote that the Negro was at the foot of the Mongol, the Yellow race was in between, and Caucasians were at the top. He also taught that the various races of mankind were simply stages in the development of the highest of Caucasian type; that the blacks were the least developed, and the Caucasians the top, the most evolved race.

Hitler and his Nazi regime believed that Aryans were the "Master Race." He fully endorsed the Nazi programme of eugenics which was the study of how to improve the Aryan race by carefully selecting Aryan parents who would produce stronger, purer, superior children. He thought that through this scientific experiment in eugenics he would advance the cause of human evolution.

Many of the early evolutionists were outspoken racists as the belief in racial superiority or inferiority was assumed to be proven. Darwinism undoubtedly was an important contributing factor in encouraging many extreme forms of racism especially in America

ss the golden rule

and Europe during the colonial and imperialistic era, believing that 'superior' races and nationalities were the only ones fit to survive. Such racism dominated many Western countries for more than a hundred years!

The myth of racial superiority/inferiority

Today, scientists have almost universally confirmed through much painstaking research

that races, primitive or civilised, are equal in regard to innate intelligence and most other traits. The lack of major differences between races, especially in intelligence factor, poses major difficulty for current evolution theory because the intelligence factor is most crucial for the major contrast between

Homo Sapiens (human beings) and 'lower form of life.'

The most recent research in genetics, the decoding of the human genome, points to one human species, albeit infinitely varied in secondary aspects of life. The reality of one human race of having common origin and same ancestry is much supported by science, anthropology, psychology and sociology today. Similarly, in the field of religion, the great religions in the world likewise uphold the truth or the principle of "brotherhood of mankind," even if followers have, at times, practised fallacious belief of superiority.

Roots of racism

Racism does not begin with the colour of skin but within the human heart and mind.

Racism, manifesting pride of superiority, stereotyped prejudices, unreasonable intolerances, discrimination and contempt, naturally opposes the well-being of other races. Racism, like any form of immorality, blatantly breaks, violates, and transgresses the Golden Rule.

fellowman. This is the law: all the rest is commentary."

- Islam (800 AD) "None of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself."

All these positive and negative or passive versions of the Golden Rule can be found in the Laws of God written in the Holy Bible; "Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great,

but judge your neighbour fairly. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord."¹

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ said, "So in everything, do to others that you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."² Jesus, when questioned which was the greatest

commandment in the Law of God, gave this in reply, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself. All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commandments."³

When Jesus said we are to love God and neighbour because this is "All the Law and the Prophets," He meant that this is the most important spiritual principle governing all forms of relationships. All other laws or commandments are but subsidiaries, amplifying this fundamental Law of God and the Golden Rule.

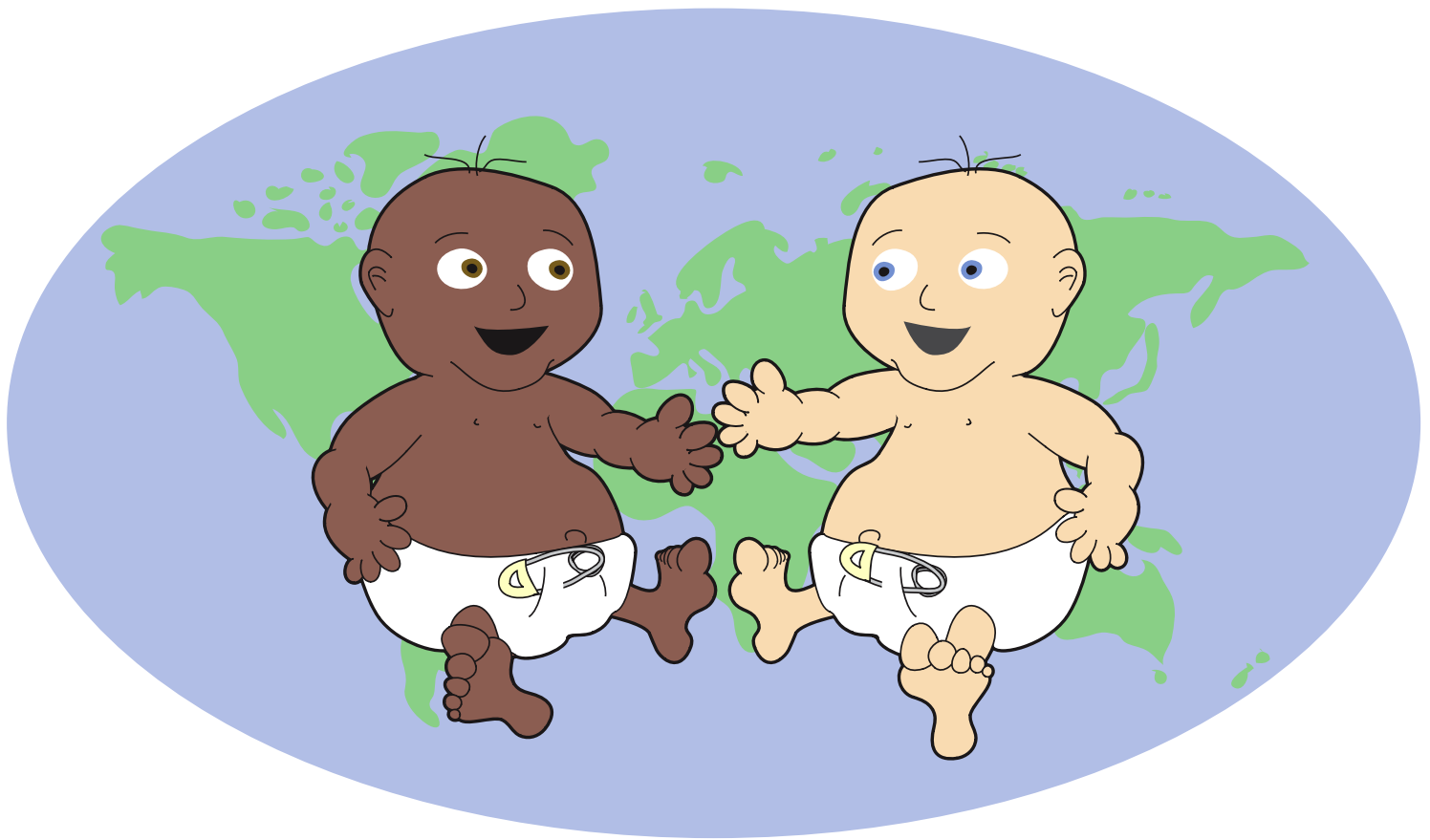
The Apostle Paul agreed with Christ what he wrote, "Let no debt remain



The Golden Rule

What is this Golden Rule? It is a statement of universal value, global ethics, moral or spiritual truth commonly found in many philosophies and religions. Here is a short list of Golden Rule statements in chronological order:

- Confucianism (550BC) "What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to other."
- Socrates (400 BC) "Do not do to others what would anger you if done to you by others."
- Hinduism (150 BC) "This is the sum of duty: Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you."
- Judaism (100 AD) "What is hateful to you do not to your



outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandments there may be, are summed up in this one rule: love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love if the fulfillment of the Law.”⁴

The Golden Rule is paramount in promoting good inter-racial relations. By rightly and wisely applying the Golden Rule it is easy to resolve amicably the many complex inter-racial problems. On the other hand, ignoring the Golden Rule, failing to observe its principles of peaceful living in harmony among the races, will ultimately bring nothing but harm to all the people. Putting love into action is the only antidote to racism.

Racism transgresses the Golden Rule

The very fact that racists assume a superiority attitude, harbour ill-will and bigotry, and show discriminatory behaviour towards other races, transgresses the Golden Rule. Racism, in its essence, does not accept equality. It can in no way see eye to eye with other races and embrace them as equals. It neither subscribes to nor practices what the Golden Rule demands—reciprocity

of others, treating them as you would treat yourself. Put another way: do to others what you would have them do to you.

Racism, in contrast, makes a mockery of the Golden Rule and has its parody version: “Do unto others before they do unto you!” Evolutionists who champion racism will perhaps cite the “law of nature” as justification, that “it is the survival of the fittest.” This “law of nature” does not seem much different from the “law of the jungle” which says, “Eat or be eaten, kill or be killed.”

Can't we do better?

Racism persists in many societies today because it is very hard to eradicate. Through education and legislation much racial prejudice has been reduced in societies around the world. The heart and core of racist problems, however, lie in human nature which seems so difficult to change. Flawed human nature has the innate tendency always to gravitate towards self-centeredness. The Bible agrees: “The heart is deceitful above all things and it is exceedingly perverse and corrupt and severely, mortally sick! Who can know it [perceive, understand, be acquainted with his own heart and mind]?”⁵

Experience agrees that it takes character and moral and spiritual

standing for anyone to overcome his or her self-centered egoistic inclinations. But this is the goal if we are to be able and willing to love one's neighbour as oneself, and follow the Golden Rule.

When the majority of our citizens believe and practice understanding, respect, tolerance and acceptance towards other races, regardless of difference in customs, traditions, cultures, creed or religions, our country will enjoy the blessings of solidarity, unity, peace and social harmony. Dwelling in a multi-racial society, there is a wise maxim worth thinking about: “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, charity.”

We each need to ask ourselves where we stand on this important issue. Do we sincerely believe that racism is wrong, anti-social, against moral and ethical codes humankind must live by whatever our religion or philosophy? Do we wholeheartedly support and embrace the concepts outlined by the Golden Rule? Will we set ourselves the goal of eliminating racial prejudice, intolerance and hatred in our own lives? □

¹ Leviticus 19: 15, 18

² Matthew 7:12

³ Matthew 22: 35–40

⁴ Romans 13:8–10

⁵ Jeremiah 17:9 (Amplified Version)

A story of shame

A large church in southern California has a program each year titled “The Glory of Christmas”. It is an elaborate program, filled with scenery, costumes, live animals, songs, flying angels and other impressive details.

The show promotes Jesus as the centre of Christmas, and that is good, but I sometimes suspect that the show gets more attention than Jesus does. Sometimes it seems that people come to see the pageantry and to hear the music, more than to focus on Jesus.

A story of humility

Actually, it seems that Jesus’ birth involves more humiliation than glory. The Son of God lived in glory, He saw us living in the slime pit of sin, and He loved us so much that He came into this slime pit to save us. He gave up His glory and He lived in humble circumstances. When Jesus was born, there was no pageantry. There was no glory in putting a baby in a manger.

Jesus didn’t deserve any shame, but He was willing to live in it, until we killed Him. That is the example God has given us. It shows us what love is. It shows us what God is like. Jesus told Philip, “If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.”¹ He wasn’t talking about appearance, but about love and humility.

When Christ became flesh, it was not some strange deviation in His character. No, it shows what God is like all the time. God is always so loving that He is willing to come to our slime pit to rescue us. He is always willing to put His own comfort and glory aside so He can rescue us.

This is true greatness. Glory is not about power and bright lights. True greatness is not in strength or money. True greatness is humility and service, and that is just as true of God as it is for us. God’s greatness is seen in His love, in His willingness to serve. The birth of Jesus shows that.

by
**Joseph
Tkach**

To put it in human terms, it would be like Pharaoh decided to give up the throne, give away his wealth and join the Hebrew slaves in the clay pits, trying to make bricks without straw.

If any Pharaoh actually did this, we would think he was insane, but God did this on an even greater scale. He gave up more, and He descended even more—and this is what God is like all the time. His glory and greatness is seen in how much He is willing to give up, not in how much He has now.

A birth in shame

Think about the circumstances of Jesus’ birth. He did not come when the Jewish people were a strong nation. Rather, He came when they were despised and ruled by a pagan empire. He did not come to the most important city—He grew up in a backwoods region called “Galilee of the Gentiles”.

Jesus was born in embarrassing circumstances, less than nine months after Mary and Joseph married. God could have easily caused the conception after Mary and Joseph were married. It would have been just as easy for the Holy Spirit to create a baby in a married woman as in an unmarried woman. It would have been easy to avoid the appearance of evil, but God did not. Even before Jesus was born, Jesus was in a compromised situation.

Luke tells us that Joseph went to Bethlehem because everyone was supposed to go to their family’s city to be counted for the census.² I don’t know, of course, but it seems that Joseph would have had at least a few brothers or cousins in the family of David who would have gone to Bethlehem, too. But we hear nothing of them.

God loved the world so much that He gave them His only Son—and the world didn’t want Him. They knew God only as a God of power and wealth; they had forgotten about the God who walked in the garden of Eden

calling for His wayward children. They had forgotten about the God who had a still, soft voice.

The world didn’t want God, but God still loved the world. Even when we were sinners, even when we were ungodly, God loved us and sent His Son to die for us.³ That is what God is always like. The birth of Jesus should remind us of that. Christmas should remind us of His great humility.

A touch of glory

The angels were a touch of glory in the nativity story. Here were the bright shining lights, the heavenly choir singing praises to God. But where did they appear? Outside of town, with shepherds, the lowest level of society. Shepherds were so despised that they couldn’t even testify in court. No one trusted them because they moved from one town to another. But God sent his angels to shepherds, not to priests and kings.

The wise men of Jerusalem knew that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem⁴, but they didn’t bother to make the five-mile trip. God was drawing the far-off, but the ones who were close, couldn’t even see the star. The glory of Christmas was so hidden that only a few people from the east could take the hint.

Not long after this, an angel warned: “Flee for your life. The king is out to kill you.” The Christ child was taken to Egypt, becoming a refugee in the land the Jews had left—the land of slavery, the land of outcasts.

This is the glory of being poor, persecuted, rejected by the people you have come to save. This is not the way we usually think of glory, but it is God’s kind of glory—the glory of love and self-sacrifice. Who ever wants to be great, Jesus said, let him become a servant. This is true greatness because this is the way God is.

Just like Jesus

God is like a King who steps into the mud to help us make bricks without straw. He is like a King who sends His Son to His people even though He knows they will kill Him. God is

like someone who sacrifices Himself to keep His enemies from being punished.

God is like Jesus—all the time. He is like a man who loves children, touches lepers and socialises with tax collectors and prostitutes. God is like someone who was hated without a cause, beaten without mercy and crucified without committing a crime.

God lets people hate Him and beat up on Him—not because He is a fool, but because He knows the best way for us to come to our senses is to see what selfishness really leads to. He knows that the best way to overcome evil is not by force, but by persistent love.

Thankfully, God has the power to pull it off. He is not hurt by our failings. He does not get depressed when we reject Him. He does not get vindictive when we insult Him. He is bigger than that, so much bigger that He can

be patient with us. He can be a helpless baby, He can be a crucified criminal, He can stoop that low because He loves us.

In this way, Christmas shows us what God is like. It shows us how much He loves us. It shows us the extreme that He went to in order to save us. God is so glorious that He

left his glory and came down into the slime pit to save us. He was willing to be a baby conceived before marriage, to be born in a stable, to be rejected, to flee to Egypt. He was willing to give it all up, even His life, for us.

greater than the master. If He, our lord and teacher, has served us, we should also serve one another⁵. Whoever wants to be great should become a servant. Jesus wants us to go out of our way to help others. We are to use our time and our resources to help others. Jesus

also said, if you want to follow Me, take up your cross. Be willing to lose, even your life, and you will be great.

This is the way we are to follow Jesus' example. We don't follow His example in keeping Hanukkah, in cleansing the temple, or in going to synagogues on the Sabbath. But He specifically says that we are to follow his example in serving others. That's the message of Christmas and the path of true glory.

We need to identify with that baby in the manger, to be like He is. We need to identify with the woman who had to give birth in a stable, and with the family who were refugees in another nation. Our role model is someone who loved His enemies,

who was rejected time and again, and yet loved them. He was taken advantage of, ridiculed, despised and convicted of a crime, all because He wanted to help us. □



A lesson for us

God wants us to be like He is, to be like Jesus was. Not in appearance, not in power, but in love and humility. He set the example for us, and Christmas, or the birth of Jesus, has a message for us in how we behave toward one another.

Jesus said that a servant is not

¹ John 14:9

² Luke 2:3–4

³ Romans 5:6, 8, 10

⁴ Matthew 2:4–6

⁵ Matthew 20: 26–28



Why would God want me?

I'm not perfect. I have all kinds of problems. I have no ability. I have no gifts. I'm just not worthy. Why would God want me?

Well, did you know that....

Moses stuttered.

David's armor didn't fit.

John Mark deserted Paul.

Timothy had ulcers.

Hosea's wife was a prostitute.

Amos' only training was in the school of fig-tree pruning.

Jacob was a liar.

David had an affair.

Solomon was too rich.

Jesus was too poor.

Abraham was too old.

David was too young.

Peter was afraid of death.

Lazarus was dead.

John was self-righteous.

Naomi was a widow.

Paul was a persecutor of the church.

Moses was a murderer.

Jonah ran from God's will.

Miriam was a gossip.

Gideon and Thomas both doubted.

Jeremiah was depressed and suicidal.

Elijah was burned out.

John the Baptist was a loudmouth.

Martha was a worry-wart.

Noah got drunk.

Did I mention that Moses had a short fuse?

So did Peter, Paul - well, lots of folks did.

But God doesn't require a job interview for salvation.

He's our Heavenly Father.

He doesn't look at financial gain or loss. He's not prejudiced or partial, not judging, grudging, sassy, or brassy, not deaf to our cry, not blind to our need.

He knows who we are and what we are and loves us in spite of ourselves

Author Unknown

Hmm...

EASY... DIFFICULT

Easy is to get a place in someone's address book.
Difficult is to get a place in someone's heart.

Easy is to judge the mistakes of others
Difficult is to recognize our own mistakes

Easy is to talk without thinking
Difficult is to refrain the tongue

Easy is to hurt someone who loves us.
Difficult is to heal the wound...

Easy is to forgive others
Difficult is to ask for forgiveness

Easy is to set rules.
Difficult is to follow them...

Easy is to dream every night.
Difficult is to fight for a dream...

Easy is to show victory.
Difficult is to assume defeat with dignity...

Easy is to admire a full moon.
Difficult to see the other side...

Easy is to stumble with a stone.
Difficult is to get up...

Easy is to enjoy life every day.
Difficult to give its real value...

Author Unknown

When we are reading, we often find something that attracts our interest. It's not earth-shattering, or life-changing. But it's worth cutting out and keeping, or sticking on the refrigerator door; or maybe sending to us for this page!

We invite all our readers to contribute news items, quotes, or poems, that make you say 'Hmm'. It could be in today's paper, or in a book hundreds of years old. Try to send the original clipping, or a copy of the page to:

*Hmm... The Plain Truth,
Locked Bag 2002,
41990 Klang,
Selangor,
Malaysia.*

Why were

You were born for a purpose! God created each of us for a reason—and we are happiest when we are living in harmony with the purpose He has given us. You need to know what it is.

Many people have no idea what life is all about. They live, and they die, searching for some kind of meaning, wondering whether their lives have purpose—where they fit, whether they really matter in the grand scheme of things. They may have put together the finest bottle collection in Ohio, or they may have been voted “most popular” in high school, but all too soon, youthful plans and dreams evaporate into anxiety and frustration over missed opportunities, failed relationships or countless other “if-onlys” and “might-have-beens”.

Many people lead empty, unfulfilled lives, lacking in solid purpose and meaning beyond the short-lived gratification of money, sex, power, respect or popularity, none of which means anything, especially when the darkness of death approaches. But life could be much more than this, because God offers each of us much more. He offers us true significance and purpose—the joy of being what he created us to be.

Made in God's image

The first chapter of the Bible tells us that God created humans “in His own image”. Men and women alike are created “in the image of God”.¹

Obviously, we are not in God's image in terms of height or weight or skin colour. God is spirit, uncreated, and we are created of matter. Still, God has made humanity in His own image, which means that there are essential ways in which He has made us to be like Him. We are self-aware, we can communicate, plan, think creatively, design and build, solve problems, and be a force for good in our world. And we can love.

We are to be “created like God in true righteousness and holiness”.² Yet, often in those very ways, people are not much like God at all. In

fact, people can often be rather ungodly.

In spite of our ungodliness, however, there are certain things we can be sure of. For one thing, God will always be faithful in His love toward us.

A perfect example

The New Testament helps us understand what it means to be made in the image of God. The apostle Paul tells us that God is remaking us into something that is perfect and good—the likeness of Jesus Christ. “He also predestined (us) to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers”.³ In other words, God intended from the beginning for us to be like Jesus, the Son of God in the flesh.

Paul says that Jesus Himself “is the image of God”.⁴ “He is the image of the invisible God”.⁵ He is the perfect example of what we were created to be. We are God's children, in His family, and we look to Jesus, God's Son, to see what that means.

One of Jesus' disciples asked Him, “Show us the Father”.⁶ And Jesus answered, “anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father.”⁷ In other words, Jesus says, “what you really need to know about God, you can see in Me.”

He is not talking about skin colour, clothing styles, or carpentry skills, *per se*, except as we understand and use such things in ways consistent with the image of God.

Jesus is talking about spirit, attitude and actions. God is love,⁸ John later wrote, and Jesus shows us what love is, and how we are to love as people being conformed to His image.

Since human beings were made in the image of God, and Jesus is the image of God, it is no wonder that God is conforming us to the image of Jesus. He is to be “formed” in us.⁹ Our goal is “attaining the whole measure of

**by
Michael
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the fullness of Christ”.¹⁰ As we are changed into Jesus' image, the image of God is restored in us, and we become what we were made to be.

Maybe you aren't very Jesus-like right now. That's OK. God already knows about it, and that is why He is already working with you. If you let Him, He will change you—transform you—to be more and more like Christ.¹¹ It takes patience—but the process fills life with meaning and purpose.

Why doesn't God do it all in the blink of an eye? Because that wouldn't take into account the real, thinking and loving person He made you to be. A change of mind and heart, the decision to turn to God and trust Christ, may take only a moment, like deciding to go down a certain road. But the actual journey down the road takes time and may be filled with obstacles and troubles. In the same way, it takes time to change habits, behaviours and ingrained attitudes.

Besides, God loves you and wants you to love Him. But love is love only when it is freely given, not when it is demanded. Forced love is not love at all.

It gets better and better

God's purpose for you is not only to be like Jesus was 2,000 years ago—but also to be like Jesus is now—resurrected, immortal, filled with glory and power! He “will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body”.¹² If we have been united with Christ in this life, “we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection”.¹³ “We shall be like Him,” John assures us.¹⁴

If we are God's children, Paul writes, then we can be sure that “we may also share in His glory”.¹⁵ We will be given a glory like Jesus Christ has—bodies that are immortal, bodies that never deteriorate, bodies that are spiritual. We will be raised in glory, Paul writes, and raised in power.¹⁶ “Just as we have borne the likeness

you born?

of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven”—we will be like Christ!¹⁷

Would you like to be like Jesus Christ? Would you like to have glory and immortality? God has made you for this very reason! It is a wonderful gift that He wants you to have. It is an exciting and wonderful future—and it gives life meaning and purpose.

When we see the end result, the process we are in now makes more sense. The troubles, trials and pains of life, as well as the joys, make more

sense when we know what life itself is all about. When we know the glory that will be given to us, the sufferings of this life are easier to endure.¹⁸ God has given us exceedingly great and precious promises.

Is there a problem here?

But wait a minute, you might think. I'll never be good enough for that kind of glory and power. I'm just an ordinary person. If heaven is a perfect place, then

I don't belong there. I've made mistakes; my life is messed up.

That's OK—God already knows that, but He isn't going to let it stop Him. He has plans for you, and He has already planned for problems like that to be overcome. That's because everybody has blown it; everybody's life is messed up, and nobody deserves to be given glory and power.

But God knows how to save people who are sinners—and no matter how many times they mess up, He knows how to rescue them.

God's plan centers on Jesus Christ—who was sinless in our place and who suffered for our sins in our place. He represents us

before God and offers us the gift of eternal life, if we will accept it from Him.

The gift of God

We all fall short, Paul says, but we have been justified, or set right, through the grace of God. It's a gift! We can't earn it or deserve it—God just gives it to us out of his mercy and righteousness.

People who are doing fine on their own don't need to be saved—it is people who are in trouble who need to be saved. Lifeguards don't

place in a perfect world, because we are not perfect. We have all fallen short, but we are set right by God's gift, because of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

Not by good works

God has saved us, the Bible says, “not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace”.¹⁹ “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.”²⁰

Even if our works are very good, they are not the reason God saves

us. We need to be rescued because our good works are not enough to save us. We need mercy and grace, and God gives us exactly that in Jesus Christ.

If it were possible for us to earn eternal life through good behaviour, then God would have told us how. If rule-keeping could give us eternal life, Paul says, then God would have done it that way.

“If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come

by the law.”²¹ But the law cannot give us life—even if we could keep it.

“If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”²² If people could earn their way into salvation, then we wouldn't need a Saviour to rescue us. There would be no need for Jesus to come to earth, or to die and be raised again.

But Jesus came to earth for this very reason—to die for us. Jesus, calling Himself the Son of man, said that He came “to give his life as a ransom for many”²³. His life was like a ransom payment, given to rescue us, or redeem us. The Bible repeatedly says that “Christ died for us” and that He died “for our sins”.²⁴



'save' people who are swimming OK on their own—they save those who are drowning. And spiritually speaking, we are all drowning. None of us measures up to the perfection of Christ, and without that, we're as good as dead.

Many people seem to think that we have to be 'good enough' for God. Suppose we ask them, “What makes you think that you'll go to heaven, or that you'll have eternal life in the kingdom of God?” Many people will respond, “Because I've been good. I've done this, or I've done that.”

The truth is, that no matter how much good we have done, we are never 'good enough' to earn

“The wages of sin is death,” Paul says in Romans 6:23, “but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We deserve to die, he says, but we are saved by grace through Jesus Christ. We don’t deserve to live with God, since we aren’t perfect, but God saves us through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Descriptions of salvation

The Bible explains our salvation in several ways—sometimes using financial terms, sometimes sacrificial words, sometimes family or friendship words. In financial terms, He has paid the price to free us.

He took the penalty (death) that we deserved, paying the debt that we owed. He takes our sin and death, and in return, He gives us His righteousness and life.

God accepts Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf (after all, He is the one who sent Jesus to give it), and He accepts Jesus’ righteousness on our behalf. Therefore, though once we were opposed to God, now we are friends.²⁵

“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. But now He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in His sight.”²⁶

Because of Christ’s death, we are holy in God’s sight. In God’s book, we have gone from a huge debt to a huge reward—not because of what we have done, but because of what Jesus did for us.

God now calls us His children—He has adopted us.²⁷ “We are God’s children,” Paul writes.²⁸ And then he describes the wonderful results of our adoption: “Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ.”²⁹ Salvation is described as an inheritance. “He has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.”³⁰

Because of God’s generosity, because of His grace, we will inherit

a fortune—we will share the universe with Jesus Christ. Or rather, He will share it with us, not because of anything we have done, but because He loves us and wants to give it to us.

Received through faith

Jesus has qualified us; He has paid the penalty not only for our sins, but for the sins of all human beings.³¹ But many people do not yet understand this. Perhaps they have not yet heard the message of salvation, or they heard a garbled version that didn’t make sense to them. For some reason, they have not believed the message.

It’s like Jesus has paid their debts for them, and given them a huge bank account, but they haven’t

by believing the good news.

“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.”³² The gospel is effective for “the salvation of everyone who believes.”³³ If we don’t believe the message, it won’t do us any good.

Of course, there is more to faith than just believing certain facts about Jesus. The facts have some dramatic implications for us—we have to turn away from the life we’ve created in our own image and turn instead to God who made us in His.

We have to admit that we are sinners, that we haven’t earned the right to have eternal life, and that we don’t deserve to share in an inheritance with Jesus Christ. We have to admit that we’ll never be

‘good enough’ for heaven—and we have to trust that the ticket Jesus gives us is indeed good enough to get us into the party. We have to trust that He did enough, by dying on the cross, to pay our spiritual debts. We have to trust in His mercy and grace, admitting that there is no other way to get in.

A free offer

Let’s bring the discussion back to our purpose in life. God says

that He made us for a purpose, and that purpose is that we become like Him. We are to be united with God’s family, brothers and sisters of Jesus, sharing in the family fortune! It’s a wonderful purpose and wonderful promise.

But we haven’t done our part. We haven’t been as good as Jesus—that is, we haven’t been perfect. Then what makes us think we’ll get the other end of the deal—the eternal glory? The answer is that we have to trust God to be as merciful and full of grace as He says He is. He has made us for this purpose, and He is going to see it through! We can be confident, Paul says, “he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion”³⁴.



yet heard about it, or don’t quite believe it, or don’t think they had any debts in the first place. Or it’s like Jesus is throwing a party, and He gives them a ticket to get in, and yet some people decide not to come.

Or they are slaves working in the mud, and Jesus comes along and says, “I have purchased your freedom.” Some people don’t hear the message, some people don’t believe it, and some people would rather stay in the mud than find out what freedom really is. But others hear the message, believe it, and step out of the mud to see what a new life with Christ might be.

The message of salvation is received by faith—by trusting Jesus, by taking Him at His word,

Jesus has paid the price and done the work, and His message—the message of the Bible—is that our salvation comes by what He has done for us. Experience (as well as Scripture) says that we can't trust in ourselves.

Our only hope of salvation, of life, of becoming who God made us to be, is to trust in Christ. We can become like Christ because He, knowing all about our failings and shortcomings, says that He will bring it about!

Without Christ, life is pointless—we are stuck in the mud. But Jesus tells us that He has purchased our freedom, He can make us clean, He offers us a free ticket to the party and full rights in the family fortune. We can accept His offer, or we can dismiss it and stay in the mud.

You're invited to a banquet!

Jesus looked like an insignificant carpenter in an insignificant village in an insignificant part of the Roman Empire. But now He is widely regarded as the most significant person who ever lived. Even non-believers recognise that He gave up His life to serve others, and this ideal of self-sacrificial love reaches into the depths of the human soul and touches the image of God within us.

He taught that people could find true and abundant life if they are willing to give up their own faltering hold on existence and follow Him into the life of the kingdom of God. "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."³⁵ We have nothing to lose but a pointless life, a frustrating life, and Jesus offers us a fulfilling, joyful, exciting and abounding life—for eternity. He invites us to give up pride and worry, and we gain peace of mind and joy of heart.

The path of Jesus

Jesus invites us to join Him in His glory—but the journey to glory requires humility, through putting other people before ourselves. We have to loosen our grip on the things of this life, and fasten our hold on Jesus. If we want a new life, we have to be willing to let go of the old one.

We were made to be like Jesus. But we are not just copying a respected hero, such as Buddha or Confucius. Christianity is not about religious rituals or even

religious ideals. It is about God's love for humanity, His faithfulness to humanity, and His love and faithfulness made visible in human form in Jesus Christ.

In Jesus, God demonstrates His grace; He knows that no matter how hard we try, we will never be good enough on our own. In Jesus, God gives us help; He sends the Holy Spirit in Jesus' name to live within us, to change us from the inside out. God is making us to be like Himself; we are not trying to be Godlike on our own.

Jesus has for us an eternity of joy, not a return to vague, impersonal nothingness like some Eastern religions offer. For them, it seems, the purpose of life is to blend without personal identity into the rest of the cosmos. But in Christianity each person's life as an individual, as a child in the family of God, has purpose and significance—an eternity of life. We were made for eternal glory, and the path to glory is Jesus, who Himself is the Way, the Truth and the Life³⁶.

For Jesus, it meant a cross. He calls us to join Him on that part of the journey, too. "If anyone would come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."³⁷ But the cross was followed by the resurrection to glory.

A celebration banquet

In some of His teaching stories, Jesus compared salvation to a banquet. In the parable of the prodigal son, the father threw a party for the rebellious son who finally came home. "Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."³⁸ Jesus told the story to illustrate the point that all of heaven rejoices whenever anyone turns toward God.³⁹

Jesus told another story about a man (illustrating God) who "was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests."⁴⁰ But surprisingly, many people ignored the invitation. "They all alike began to make excuses."⁴¹ Some were worried about their money, or their work; others were distracted by family matters.⁴² So the master invited poor people instead.⁴³

So it is with salvation. Jesus invites everyone, but some people

are too busy with the cares of this world to respond. But those who are "poor," who realize there are more important things than money, sex, power and respect, are eager to come celebrate true life at Jesus' banquet.

Jesus told another story comparing salvation to a man (illustrating Jesus) who went on a journey. He "called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability."⁴⁴ The money could represent various things that Christ gives us; let's look at it here as representing the message of salvation.

After a long time, the master came back and asked for an accounting. Two of the servants showed that they had accomplished something with the master's money, but one person simply handed it back.⁴⁵ He hadn't accomplished anything with it; he had not let it work in his life. He had declined the offer.

The first two servants were rewarded: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"⁴⁶

You are invited!

Yes, Jesus is inviting us to share in His happiness, to share in the eternal joys God has for us⁴⁷. He is calling us to be like Him, to be immortal, incorruptible, glorious and sinless. Our spiritual bodies will have supernatural power. We will have a vitality, intelligence, creativity, power and love far beyond what we know now.

We can't do this on our own—we have to let God do it in us. We have to accept His invitation to get out of the mud, and come to His celebration banquet.

Have you thought about accepting His invitation? If you do, you may not see amazing results right away, but your life will definitely take on new significance and meaning. You'll gain purpose, you'll understand where you're going and why, and you'll be given new strength, new courage and great peace.

Jesus is inviting you to a party that lasts forever. Will you accept the invitation? Talk to Him right now—give Him your old and pointless life, and ask Him to create in you His new life, a life full of purpose and joy. □

¹ Genesis 1:27

² Ephesians 4:24

³ Romans 8:29

⁴ 2 Corinthians 4:4

⁵ Colossians 1:15

⁶ John 14:8

⁷ John 14:9

⁸ 1 John 4:8

⁹ Galatians 4:19

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:13

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 3:18

¹² Philippians 3:21

¹³ Romans 6:5

¹⁴ 1 John 3:2

¹⁵ Romans 8:17

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:42–44

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:49

¹⁸ Romans 8:18

¹⁹ 2 Timothy 1:9

²⁰ Titus 3:5

²¹ Galatians 3:21

²² Galatians 2:21

²³ Matthew 20:28

²⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:3

²⁵ Romans 5:10

²⁶ Colossians 1:21–22

²⁷ Ephesians 1:5

²⁸ Romans 8:16

²⁹ Romans 8:17

³⁰ Colossians 1:12

³¹ 1 John 2:2

³² Acts 16:31

³³ Romans 1:16

³⁴ Philippians 1:6

³⁵ Matthew 10:39

³⁶ John 14:6

³⁷ Luke 9:23

³⁸ Luke 15:23–24

³⁹ Luke 15:7

⁴⁰ Luke 14:16

⁴¹ Luke 14:18

⁴² Luke 14:18–20

⁴³ Luke 14:21

⁴⁴ Matthew 25:14–15

⁴⁵ Matthew 25:25

⁴⁶ Matthew 25:21–23

⁴⁷ Psalm 16:11

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