

THE Plain Truth

PP 12578/3/2007

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Apr-Jun 2006

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How important is media responsibility?

Perhaps one of the most common scenes one encounters early in the morning, especially during breakfast, is the sight of a person skimming through a newspaper over a cup of coffee. Many people start their day by reading a newspaper first thing in the morning, and much of their conversations through the day with colleagues or friends often revolve around the news, information and opinions gleaned from it. Others would be on the Internet glued to the endless information it provides. Yet others would also be listening to the radio, watching the news on television or just reading a magazine. We live in the age of the all-powerful media. At no time in history has there been such an explosion of information reaching people at every corner of the globe. More importantly, at no time in history has there been such an opportunity to influence the minds of people in so profound a way.

Today, governments are all extremely concerned about what the media prints or broadcasts. The day-to-day reports of the situation in Iraq, for example, sway public opinion either to support the war or more commonly to oppose it. Political leaders are extremely careful when dealing with the media since wrong statements or decisions have even caused their downfall. All this leads to the awareness of the immense power that the media wields and to the question of whether that power is used in a responsible manner. There is much debate about providing freedom for the press to operate without restrictions or whether such freedom should be limited or curtailed. Some seek to establish an environment of complete freedom to be able to say or print anything they desire even if it causes misunderstandings or hurt feelings. But the real question to ponder is whether press freedom or media rights equals freedom of speech without having to bear the responsibilities that arise from the consequences of what is said.

It cannot be denied that in many instances the media has been most instrumental in revealing the atrocities that have occurred in many parts of the world, and have brought about change. The United Nations through NATO was prompted to act in the armed conflict in Bosnia to bring about the end of the genocide that was being carried out there during the Bosnian war from 1992 to 1995. The world reeled in horror at the horrifying images of the massacres carried out by the Hutus against the Tutsis in the Rwandan Genocide where 937,000 people were slaughtered in 1994. Today, the terrible conditions in Darfur are brought vividly to our homes through the media. In all this, one very important factor needs to be considered: How do people of different ethnic backgrounds, cultures, religious beliefs and mindsets interpret what is given? The nature of the audience involved and how they would interpret information are an integral part of media responsibility. Not all people perceive or react to the information revealed in the same manner. This is one of the most basic criteria that must be considered when approaching the audience or public.

People of one nation often react differently from those of another nation. One culture would not see things in the same light as another. Nor would one race or people accept matters pertaining to themselves in the same tone as others. This is the paramount factor that needs to be considered when providing information or stating opinions through the media. Even the most beneficial, useful or light-hearted information may not be received with the openness or tolerance that is expected. In some cases shocking consequences arise when religious sensitivities are touched. What some consider as innocent fun is interpreted as an unforgivable insult by others.

Violent reactions can ensue. By then the damage is done and damage control may not be sufficient especially when innocent lives are lost.

It may sound strange but even the most revered people of the world have often been accused of insensitivity and their message rejected. Jesus Christ came to mankind bringing the message of hope and redemption, and yet He was criticised and rejected. Although many received Him and believed in Him, there were those who refused to have anything to do with Him because they considered His message unacceptable.¹ In some circumstances there were violent reactions against Him, some even sought to injure him.² Others even went to the extent of trying to murder Him for what He said.³ But there was one significant difference that stood out about Jesus—that is, He never forced His message upon anyone. Neither did He seek to harm those who refused to hear.⁴ On the other hand, those who rightly received and understood what He said did receive the gift of salvation and the joy of a relationship with God.

In today's environment, the media plays an all-important role in the lives of people and hence automatically is entrusted with a social responsibility. To knowingly print or throw opinions that would cause harm or hurt is irresponsible. The media must never be used this way. It must always assume the role to build or improve upon society especially in matters pertaining to race relations, religion and politics. This is true press freedom, true freedom of speech. We believe that The PLAIN TRUTH magazine is entrusted with a social responsibility to present the message of Jesus Christ to the world. Through this magazine we seek to nurture people's lives and hope to affect people in a positive manner. May the gospel of Jesus Christ bring hope and healing to all who are willing to receive it. □

¹ John 6:65–66

² John 10:31

³ John 11:53

⁴ Luke 9:51–56

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What our readers say:

The PLAIN TRUTH is informative, motivational and spiritual and I have gained a fair bit of guidance from it. Mak Geoh Yuen, Kuala Lumpur

Hi ! I'm a new reader of the Plain Truth magazine. I'm only fifteen, so I can't send you cheques or money directly to you. I was just wondering if there is any other alternative to help you. How can I contribute? Abraham Sebastian, Taiping

Ed.: It is a delight to hear from our readers especially someone of your age. You may probably be one of our youngest subscribers. We hope you will find The Plain Truth Asia helpful and inspirational. Please do not worry about being unable to contribute any financial support to our magazine. You certainly can help us by your prayers so that more readers who are financially blessed are able to make donations to support the publication of this magazine.

Generally the articles are interesting and some are really thought provoking. I have also recommended The PLAIN TRUTH to some of my non-Christian friends. Ronald Soo, Klang

The contents of The PLAIN TRUTH are very interesting and I am able to acquire more information and knowledge from the magazine. A Jayakumari, Sentul Pasar

The articles and the subject matter assisted me in broadening my understanding of the Christian faith from many perspectives. Hoh Kon Wai, Cheras

The current religious knowledge we receive nowadays during the one-hour Sunday mass is not enough. Parents and children are too busy with schoolwork, tuition and extra activities and they do not have



sufficient time to study the Bible. The PLAIN TRUTH tackles current and biblical issues by using a down-to-earth approach, making the issues easier to understand. Lawrence Michael, Cheras

The PLAIN TRUTH not only enhances my knowledge of the Gospel but also matters pertaining to life which are relevant to us. Magdalene Ang, Kuala Lumpur

The PLAIN TRUTH inspires me. It has taught me the way of Life and it is valuable to my spiritual life. Kung Kuan Hao, Tawau

The PLAIN TRUTH has articles that open our minds to many things that we take for granted and the words of the Lord become more meaningful. After I have read it, the copy is circulated to many others. Dr. Daisy Arianayagam, Sungei Petani

The PLAIN TRUTH is spiritually enlightening and helps to spread the Good News to my patients too. A very small contribution to continue your good work. Dr. Shanta Oommen, Kuala Lumpur

The PLAIN TRUTH is informative and insightful. It also provides a new and fresh perspective on several issues on Christianity, the bible and world affairs. Keep it up! May God bless you all. V Rajan, Sungei Buloh

The PLAIN TRUTH is stimulating and interesting and it gives us more wisdom (God's Wisdom) to face this challenging world. It keeps us focussed on our Creator. Lim S C, Klang

The PLAIN TRUTH gives me great pleasure in reading it. It's very

informative and contains lots of new and interesting knowledge. It's really of great help to me especially in my thinking and daily life. Teoh Koy Yam, Sungei Petani

The magazine has valuable information that is needed in everyday life and such information is essential for our spiritual health and well-being. The photographs are captivating too. Violet Neo, Alor Setar

The PLAIN TRUTH enlightens me on the knowledge of the Bible. It relates the simple interpretations of the Bible to our everyday life. Bobby Ng, Kuala Lumpur

The articles in The PLAIN TRUTH are very expository and thought provoking. They make the scriptures come alive. The articles on personal encounters are very inspiring and make us think more deeply of the love of God. You are doing a wonderful job bringing the Gospel to others. Keep it up. God bless you. Peter Sebastian, Kuala Kangsar

The articles written in The PLAIN TRUTH are very inspiring and informative. It's a good Christian magazine. Peter Lee Weng Onn, Alor Setar

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

Battling giants

No one expected a shepherd boy to do the army's fighting that day, and no rule of engagement made him Israel's champion.

Imagine a boy running into battle with nothing more than a slingshot and a few smooth stones. When I think of boys with slingshots, I think of Dennis the Menace, and how even the Mr. Wilsons of the world intimidate me. So you can imagine how impressed I am with David when I remember that his grumpy neighbor was a nine-foot warrior with a shield bearer, spear, sword and history of killing everyone he faced.

But what amazes me the most isn't the way David ran into battle, or the way God blessed his efforts and toppled the giant. Rather, it's what God has to say about this boy who later became a king. God called him "a man after my own heart".¹

Wow! David was a man after God's own heart. I have to wonder what that says about God's heart. After all, it was David's heart that drove him into battle—not his sense of duty. No one expected a shepherd boy to do the army's fighting that day, and no rule of engagement made him Israel's champion.

Indeed, the army that was supposed to do the fighting must have thought he was insane. David knew better, though. God had already empowered him to kill a lion and a bear, and he knew the Almighty would do the same with this unusually large man. That knowledge and experience of God gave David the freedom to act out of his true heart to do the extraordinary.

So what does the account of David and Goliath say about God's heart? In the past, I've thought that God was great because He followed a great moral code, and I guess I saw His love as His sense of duty to that code. I was just glad He figured out the rules long before man came along. But,

if God is great only because He obeys certain rules, then He is a slave to law and really isn't God at all.

God's love cannot be described, directed or contained by any list. It is powerful and blowing wherever God wills because He is the one that is all knowing, all wise and all loving.

What moral code says that God should die for traitors? Jesus went to His cross like a shepherd boy running toward a giant, not a lawyer looking for a loophole. In fact, He could have backed out with a single word to the legions of angels under His command, but He didn't.²

Think about what that means. The fact that Jesus was able to back out proves that He was driven by love, not law. Never forget that. He was tortured and died because of His love, not because of a stale sense of duty to rules of proper behavior. Of course, the rules did say that somebody had to die for mankind's betrayal; but only love explains why Jesus volunteered.

God is not some detached old man playing chess with mortality. He's a mighty warrior rushing into battle to save His children. His love is furious and powerful, and when He unleashes it, all creation takes notice. That's why the apostle Paul was so confident when he wrote "...that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."³

So what's the point? Why does it matter? Does God's motivation change anything? One reason it matters is that we tend to relate to God in the same way we think God relates to us. If we think that God is driven by allegiance to a list of rules, we will try to relate to Him in exactly the same way. We will be like the rich young ruler who asked, "What good thing must I do

by
**Brent
Meranda**

to get eternal life?"⁴ Jesus told the young man to sell all that he had and follow Him.⁵

He tells us the same thing. Maybe not literally, but he does tell us to do whatever it takes. Sell everything to buy the field that holds the priceless treasure. Pluck out your eye if it causes you to sin. Cut off your hand if it separates you from God. Fight the evil giants in your life. Fight the evil that invades your thoughts.

There is a problem, though. God is full of passionate love because His heart is good, but what chance do we have? Jeremiah says that our heart is "deceitful above all things and beyond cure"⁶, so how can we rely on it for the passion we need to live for God? Don't worry. God did not leave us hopeless. He promised us a new heart⁷—one that is like His own.

So what does God want from us? He wants us to pursue Him with passion. Indifference does not please Him.⁸ Your new heart is a glorious thing, so fight for it. Stand up to the powers of darkness that want to steal your new heart. Guard it as if your life depends on it.

We don't battle against physical giants. Our enemies are much more deadly; they are spiritual. So pull out all the stops and battle with all your heart.

Do whatever it takes. Put on the full armour of God. Pray. Fast. Meditate. Sing praises. Read the Bible. Encourage one another. Dress yourself in gentleness, kindness, humility, compassion, patience and above all—love.

And stop looking for a comprehensive list of things you should or shouldn't do in order to know Jesus and inherit eternal life. Instead, do whatever it takes. Jesus is worth it. Then run into battle like a shepherd boy. □

¹ Acts 13:22

² Matthew 26:53

³ Roman 8:38–39

⁴ Matthew 19:16

⁵ Mark 10:21

⁶ Jeremiah 17:9

⁷ Ezekiel 36:26

⁸ Revelation 3:16

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Thoughts o

Worship is such a religious-sounding word, isn't it? But whether religious or not, we still need something to describe our relationship with God. This is especially so in our mundane, everyday life. It does not matter whether you are a student, a salaried person working hard to hold down a job, a housewife, a businessman or a retiree—worship is still a common denominator. At least, it is if you're seeking to fulfil a purpose higher than just meeting the demands of the day.

Yes, bills have to be paid, examinations passed, and the household needs to be taken care of. But there is much more to life than all that. Before dropping off to sleep each night, we should know that we have lived the purpose for which we were born. God created us for the very purpose of living forever—He tells us so.¹ It's the whole purpose or way of life. It's not surprising then that before followers of Jesus Christ were called Christians, they were known as followers who belonged to the Way.² They actively patterned their lives after the way Jesus taught His disciples to live.

What is worship?

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew and Greek. What words did they use for 'worship'?

The Hebrew word *shachah* was most commonly translated as 'worship' in the Old Testament; its corresponding Greek word in the New Testament is *proskuneo*. The apostle John used this word in recording Jesus' statement about true worship.³ These two words combine to portray an attitude of stooping and adoration and, according to William Templer, adoration is the most selfless emotion human nature is capable of. The Hebrew word suggests an open adoration, as of a dog licking its master's hand. It is a joyful embracing of God in heartfelt thanksgiving, and extolling Him in grateful response to His provision and His acts of salvation. Expressions like "God is sovereign" and "He is my



by
**Mak
Chew Yeng**

all in all" are attempts to describe this deep sense of obeisance. Thus, when a person worships in reverential prayer like this, the manner of his posture or whether his arms are raised are entirely personal preferences. God is interested in what is in our hearts.

Another Hebrew word signifying "worship" is *'avad*, corresponding with *latreuo* in Greek. While the first pair of "worship" words signifies an adoring response of thanksgiving, the second indicates a life totally committed to serving God. It also means a ministry or an area of service answering to or serving God in the Spirit⁴ while attending to the people He loves. It denotes an all-encompassing cover over all that we are, and what we think, say and do in our lives, God is the final recipient.⁵ It is glad willingness to surrender to this Benevolent Master, even feeling thankful and privileged.

As the aged Mother Teresa was bent over, picking out maggots from the rotting flesh of a homeless person, she was asked how she could keep on serving like this. She answered to this effect: "Every one of these I serve, I am serving Jesus Christ." Thus is a life of worship defined.

The third Hebrew word for worship is *yare'*, with *phobeomai* as its Greek equivalent.

These verbs denote the awe and respect with which the worshipper approaches God. They mean to be in fright, even to shake in alarm and terror at the might and glory of God.

Moses was afraid to look at God in the face,⁶ and Ezekiel fell facedown on seeing the glory of God.⁷ Rugged fishermen like Peter, James and John, too, fell face down, terrified, when God spoke to them at the Transfiguration.⁸ All of these men were so filled with awe by the glory of God that in deep reverence they committed their lives to obey His voice and walk in His ways. And these God-fearing men with enthusiasm and joy

taught others after them God's way of life—which assuredly caused a change of values, purpose and pursuits. A life of worship in the fear of God is usually marked by a strong sense of security and quiet confidence, courage and staying power.

One more Hebrew verb associated with worship is *yadah*, with *exomologeas* as its Greek counterpart. These convey the concept of heartily confessing and praising God in thanksgiving and gladness. Acknowledging and professing the many divine attributes and Godly deeds, this form of worship is often expressed in prayer and singing—perhaps with extended arms raised, if the worshipper so prefers.

The meanings of these worship words overlap in some ways, but they do encompass our worship with our whole being.

So, how do we worship God?

A good place to start is to look at Jesus, God's self-portrait. How did He love, relate to and worship the Father? Jesus showed His love for the Father by doing what the Father instructed Him to do⁹—revealing the Father to the world, conveying the gospel message, reconciling mankind to God. We, too, show our love for Jesus and the Father by seeking first the Kingdom—living this physical life with God's spiritual perspective—and obey Him as our Lord and Master.¹⁰ Also, Jesus was known to retreat from the masses to spend time in prayer and worship with the Father. Sometimes, distancing Himself from His chosen disciples, He communed with the Father even late into the night. The intimate nearness borne from knowing and being known of the Father is evidenced in the relaxed confidence Jesus had in His respect towards Him. "I am in my Father and my Father is in me ... I will talk to the Father and He will provide you another Friend..."¹¹ Also, "Papa, You can—can't

n worship

you—get me out of this. Take this cup away from me. But please, not what I want—what you want.”¹² This personal intimacy is not unlike that of a loving husband and wife or bosom friends of kindred spirit.

The book of Psalms is also useful in helping us to worship, praise and commune with God. Sentiments and feelings of adoration we know we have but have difficulty in identifying and expressing are well articulated here. For example: “God—You’re my God! I can’t get enough of you! I’ve worked up such hunger and thirst for you, travelling across dry and weary deserts. So here I am in the place of worship, eyes open, drinking in your strength and glory,”¹³ and “I’m homesick, God, for your salvation; I love it when you show yourself...and should I wander off like a lost sheep—seek me! I’ll recognise the sound of your voice.”¹⁴ Modern Bible versions are especially useful here, such as The Message and The New International Version.

Another resource for worship is lyrics from hymns, spiritual songs and devotional writings. From classic hymns like “Praise Ye The Lord The Almighty”, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” and “Blessed Assurance” to contemporary spiritual songs like “Lord, I offer You my life”, “Change my heart, O God” and “There is none like You”, the lyrics and music are a great way to inspire our hearts towards worship. Short devotional writings like *Our Daily Bread* and *The Explorer* (offered free by RBC Ministries) can sometimes help start our worship time with God. *The Daily Bread* addresses everyday life issues and situations with relevant Bible scriptures and *The Explorer* also comes with discussion questions for further reflection on the subject.

Personally, I find this statement also helpful: “Condition the mind, think of one attribute of God. Focus on it... soon you’ll be

thanking and praising Him!”

Don’t make the mistake of thinking that worshipping God is something we do only in church, or while praying. We can bring worship into everything that we think, say and do. With practice, we can even have a worship lifestyle. Throughout our day, there are blocks of time when we are not consciously thinking about anything in particular, e.g. while waiting in line (at the bank, supermarket, bus stop), washing



dishes, doing laundry, watering plants, waiting for the computer to warm up, going on walks, and the like. The mind tends to wander and daydream. Use these snippets of time to thank and praise God for what we have, pray over the needs of a friend or on what we have read in the papers that day, reflect on a scripture or sing praises to Him. These odd interludes can be enjoyable and refreshing times of worship with God. In the same vein, a student’s life is worshipful when he applies himself diligently and resourcefully to his main task at hand—to study; while being in constant communion with God regarding his needs and achievements, he is glorifying God in the process.

Very often at the work place,

business deals and promotion go to the toughest and the most hardened of “warriors” in office politics. But because of a change in his life’s values, a true worshipper can imperturbably continue to practise honesty and integrity, compassion and kindness, and so brings worship to the work place.

Now let’s address issues closer to home. Sometimes when we are aware of our mistakes and weaknesses, and the hurt that they cause, can we be so stricken and come before God to confess and repent—even to the point of tears? This is worship too. Can we also hold up our relationships with family and friends as offerings to Him? Would He be pleased and glorified? In these relationships, are we peacemakers? Do peace and forgiveness characterise our relationships? Forgiveness means “I’m willing to pay the price of what you’ve done to me.” It means to forgive and to forget the hurt without revenge. When we live the way that Jesus taught, God is worshipped.

God also taught us to cheerfully extend hospitality to guests and visitors through opening up our homes. These occasions can provide extended sessions of fellowship and worship together.

And when we attend to the needs of the poor and needy through donations or visits to the senior citizens’ homes, volunteering at the Shelter for the Homeless, and helping out at orphanages, we send up a message of “I love You, God!” □

¹ 2 Corinthians 5: 4–5

² Acts 9:2

³ John 4:23–24

⁴ Philippians 3:3

⁵ Mathews 25: 34–40

⁶ Exodus 3:6

⁷ Ezekiel 1:28

⁸ Matthew 17:6

⁹ John 14:31

¹⁰ John 14:15

¹¹ John 14:16

¹² Mark 14: 36

¹³ Psalms 63:1–2

¹⁴ Psalms 119:174, 176

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Rewrite you

You may not be a scriptwriter for Hollywood or Bollywood movies, for your local radio or TV station's drama series, or even for your school's end-of-year fundraising plays. Not everyone has the talent or gift to write good scripts for movies or plays and make big money.

However, there is one script that you are definitely qualified to write—your very own life script. You will be the best person to do this because you alone can determine how you want your storyline to be—at least in the most important things that really matter. And the rewards can be fantastic, even better than what Hollywood or Bollywood can offer.

Scriptwriters exert powerful influence

The scriptwriter determines the theme of a movie, drama or play. A good storyline can make a good script, and a good script can lead to a good production. It can even become a box office hit. It can influence the hearts and minds of millions of people—movie viewers, music lovers, and radio and TV audience.

Some productions evoke unhealthy attitudes and emotions influencing people to an unhealthy lifestyle. This is unfortunate. Others however are positive and inspirational and they lead people to a healthy lifestyle.

Good and bad scripts

Most movies, dramas and plays have good ending. We like good ending because it makes us feel good. We want the hero and heroine to get married happily; we want the wicked people to be punished (or perhaps transformed); we want injustices and oppression to be removed; and we want poverty and sufferings to be eradicated. All these are very noble thoughts.

Unfortunately, in real life, many of these good things don't take place—whether in other people's lives or even in our own lives. Many people's stories have bad endings. They have no power, wisdom or knowledge to change their storyline. We feel



by
**Dr. P.
Sellappan**

bad about it, and we really wish we could do something to change their situation.

But there is hope. We can start small like a mustard seed.¹ We can start changing our storylines first and then slowly help others to change their storylines. When there are enough people doing this and we have a 'critical mass', we can together help society to change its storyline. We can help turn bad endings into good endings.

Rewrite your life script

The place to start is you. Some of your life script—especially your early years—has already been written for you. You can't do anything to change that part of your script. However, you can decide to change your storyline from now on—at least in the most important aspects of your life. So if your storyline hasn't been all that good, don't despair. There is help available and there is hope. You can take it to a happy ending.

If you don't take charge to rewrite your life script, someone else—peers, media, society or even evil forces—may do it for you and you may not like the result. Why should you let others determine your storyline?

To a large extent, your early years had been shaped by your parents, relatives, neighbours, peers, media, and society in general. You didn't have much choice. For example, you couldn't change your parentage, your DNA or genes, or your stature. Nor could you change the environment where you lived or the school you attended. You can't set the clock back now. All these were given to you and there was nothing you could do about it. You just had to accept that part of the script.

However, your life script is not over yet. You can take charge and determine how you want the rest of your storyline to proceed. Although you may not be able to control or change every aspect or situation of your life,² you can definitely

change those things that really matter to you most, such as having good relationships with family and friends, peace and happiness, security, and a bright future.

Seek advice by all means, but don't let others decide how you want your storyline to proceed.

Guidelines for writing life script

Many professional scriptwriters recommend the following steps:

1. Writing the genre or type of the script in one or two words (e.g., romance, comedy). In the context of your life script, you could for example write words like 'life' or 'death', 'happiness' or 'sadness'. These words tell you how you want your storyline to go.
2. Writing the logline of the script in one or two sentences. For example, you could write, 'I want to live a long, fun-filled and pain-free life with God, family and friends'.
3. Writing the summary of the script in a page telling briefly how you want your storyline to proceed.
4. Writing the details of the script or at least the main points of your planned storyline. That includes your plans and goals.

The above guidelines can be useful. You can configure them mentally or better still write them out.

Most of us want a long, fun-filled, and pain-free life. We also want our family and friends to be with us. And we certainly want God to be with us because only He can make all these things possible.

Check your script with a script reviewer

Scriptwriters do not always write perfect scripts. They need help, so they normally submit their scripts to a script reviewer who has the experience and expertise to check if the scripts have good storylines. So write your script and let your parents, spouse, friends,

r life script!

counsellors, pastors, and most importantly God review it. Get their feedback and revise your script as necessary. Also, be prepared to change your storyline as you go along because it can get more interesting than you had previously thought.

Live out your life script

As you 'play' or live out your life script, you will be amazed how interesting and exciting it can get. There will certainly be romance, suspense, thrills and more. You will not regret it because your life will have a good ending. Besides, you can be a positive influence to others, and help change their storylines.

Although you wouldn't know all the precise details of your life, you can nevertheless plan for a good ending if you choose to live your life according to God's truth. You can make a plan and commit your plan to God for His review, correction and approval.³ For example, if you are a teenager, you could plan to study and acquire knowledge, stay away from negative peer pressure, commit your life to God, seek His guidance and direction, and reach out to others.

God promises to help you change your storyline and bless you if you sincerely seek Him and commit your life to Him. He even assures you that He will fulfil all the desires of your heart⁴ if they are consistent with His will. So

don't let anyone tell you that you cannot change your life script. God says 'you can', and He will give you all the help you need to realise your ultimate goal.

Story of one person who rewrote his life script

This is a true story. Sam (not his real name) was in and out of prison a couple of times because

but he soon discovered that they were there to genuinely help him. They introduced him to Jesus Christ and His saving grace. He joined the rehabilitation centre run by this group. Through a systematic study of the Bible and regular worship, he came to know God more intimately. He believed in His power and gladly accepted Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior. He confessed his sins and

committed his life to God. Although he had to struggle, through God's grace he gained victory over his addiction and his wayward life.

Besides getting to know God, Sam also picked up his hobbies as well as other living skills. He now has a full-time job. He plays guitar, composes his own songs, and sings praises to God. Through God's transforming power, he is now able to live a happy and joyful life. God's grace saved him. He is a living testimony to all those who desire to rewrite their life script.

Conclusion

Your life script is not all engraved on a stone tablet. It can be changed if you so desire! So if your life had not been happy and you want to change your storyline, there is help available. You can seek help from those whose lives have

been changed, and most importantly from God. He wants you to have an abundant life⁵ with a happy ending—or more correctly, a happy, never-ending life with God, friends, and families. Yes, God wants you to rewrite your life script so that you can be happy now and forever, and He promises to give you all the help you need to realise it! □



of drug-related offences. He was a hardcore drug addict. And to satisfy his intense craving for drugs, he would engage in all sorts of crimes. He became a slave to his addiction, and he was totally helpless.

Just when Sam was down and out, he came into contact with some members of the Prison Ministry. At first he was suspicious,

¹ Matthew 13:31

² James 4:13–15

³ Proverbs 16:3

⁴ Psalms 37:4

⁵ John 10:10

Reason

The Old Testament is a story of frustrated hope. It begins by revealing that humans were created in the image of God. But it was not long before we humans sinned, and we were kicked out of paradise. But along with the word of judgment also came a word of promise—God told Satan that one of Eve’s descendants would crush Satan.¹ There would come a deliverer.

Eve probably hoped that her first child would be the solution. But it was Cain, and he was part of the problem. Sin continued, and it got worse. There was a partial salvation in the time of Noah, but sin continued. There was the sin of Canaan, and then of Babel. Humanity continued having problems, having the hope of something better but never able to achieve it.

Some important promises were given to Abraham. But he died before receiving all the promises. He had a child, but no land, and he was not yet a blessing to all the nations. But the promise continued. It was given again to Isaac, and then Jacob.

Jacob and his family went into Egypt and became a great nation, but they were enslaved. But God remained true to His promise. With spectacular miracles, God brought them out of Egypt.

But the nation of Israel fell far short of the promise. Miracles didn’t help. The law didn’t help. They kept on sinning, kept on failing, kept on doubting, kept on wandering for 40 years. But God was true to His promise, and He brought them into the land of Canaan, and with many miracles, He gave them the land.

But that did not fix their problems. They were still the same sinful people, and the book of Judges records some of the grossest of sins. How could this messed-up nation ever become a blessing to the gentiles? They kept right on sinning—falling into idolatry again and again. God finally let the northern tribes be taken into captivity by Assyria. You’d think that would have made the Jews repent,



by
**Joseph
Tkach**

but it didn’t. The people failed time and again, and God let them be taken into captivity, too.

Where was the promise now? The people were right back where Abraham had started from. Where was the promise? The promise was in God, who cannot lie. He would fulfil His promise no matter how badly the people failed.

God let the Jews stay in Babylon for 70 years, and after that, a small percentage of them returned to Jerusalem, and the Jewish nation became a shadow of its former self. They got a taste of freedom, then a taste of being ruled by Rome. They weren’t any better off in the Promised Land than they had been in Egypt or Babylon. And they groaned: Where is the promise that God gave Abraham? How are we going to be a light to the gentiles? How are the promises to David going to be fulfilled if we can’t even rule ourselves?

The people’s hopes were frustrated. Some gave up hope. Some joined an underground resistance movement. Others tried to be more religious, more worthy of God’s blessing. Everyone longed for God to do something.

A glimmer of hope

God started in the smallest possible way—as an embryo in a virgin. “Behold, I will give you a sign,” He said through Isaiah, “a virgin will conceive and bring forth a child, and you will name Him Immanuel.”² Immanuel means “God with us”. But he was first called Yeshua, which means, God will save us.

God began fulfilling His promise with a child conceived out of wedlock. There was some social stigma attached to that—even 30 years later the Jewish leaders made snide comments about Jesus’ parentage.³ Who would believe Mary’s story about angels and supernatural conception?

God began fulfilling the hopes of His people in a way that they did not recognise. No one would

have guessed that the ‘illegitimate’ baby was the answer to the nation’s hopes. A baby can’t do anything, can’t teach anyone, can’t help anyone, and can’t save anyone. But a baby has potential.

Angels told shepherds that a Savior had been born in Bethlehem.⁴ He was a Savior, but He wasn’t saving anyone right then. He even needed to be saved Himself. The family had to flee to save the baby from Herod, the king of the Jews.

But God called that helpless baby a Savior. He knew what that baby would do. In that baby were all the hopes of Israel. Here was the light to the gentiles; here was the blessing for all nations; here was the son of David who would rule the world; here was the child of Eve who would crush the enemy of all humanity. But He was just a baby, born in a stable, His life in danger. But, in His birth everything changed.

When Jesus was born, there was no sudden influx of gentiles coming to Jerusalem to be taught. There was no sign of political or economic strength—no sign except that a virgin had conceived and had given birth—a sign that no one in Judah would believe.

But God had come to us, because He is faithful to His promises, and He is the basis of all our hopes. The history of Israel shows again and again that our way does not work. We cannot achieve God’s purposes by human efforts. God does not do things the way we think, but in the way He knows will work. Our way always gets messed up. We think in terms of laws and land and kings and kingdoms of this world. God thinks in terms of tiny beginnings, of spiritual rather than physical strength, of victory in weakness rather than power.

When God gave us Jesus, He fulfilled His promises and brought about everything He had said. But we didn’t see the fulfilment right away—all we saw was a baby. Most people didn’t believe it, and even

to hope

those who believed could only hope.

Fulfilment

We know now that Jesus grew up to give His life as a ransom for our sins, to bring us forgiveness, to be a light to the gentiles, to defeat the devil, and to defeat death itself in His death and resurrection. We can see how Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promises.

We can see much more than the Jews could 2,000 years ago, but we still do not see everything there is. We do not yet see every promise fulfilled. We do not yet see Satan chained where he can deceive the nations no more. We do not yet see all nations knowing God. We do not yet see the end of crying and tears and death and dying. We still long for the final answer—but in Jesus, we have hope and assurance.

We have a promise, a promise guaranteed by God, ratified by His Son, sealed by the Holy Spirit. We believe that everything else will come true, that Christ will complete the work He has begun. Our hope is beginning to bear fruit, and we can be confident that all the promises will be fulfilled—not necessarily in the way we might expect, but in the way that God has planned.

He will do it, as promised, through His Son, Jesus Christ. We may not see it now, but God has already acted, and God is working even now behind the scenes to bring about His will. Just as in the baby Jesus we had hope and a promise of salvation, so in the risen Jesus we now have hope and

promise of completion. That is true of the growth of the kingdom of God, it is true in the work of the church, and it is true in each of our lives.

Hope for ourselves

As people come to faith in Christ, His work begins to grow in them. Jesus said that we must each be born again, and when we come to believe in Him, the Holy Spirit overshadows us and begets in us a new life. Just as Jesus promises, He comes to live within us.



Someone once said, "Jesus could be born 1,000 times, and it would do me no good, unless He is born in me." The hope that Jesus gives to the world does us no good unless we accept Him as our hope. We need to let Jesus live in us.

However, we do not yet have the fulfilment of all the promises that God has made. We do not yet have all the life and goodness that He offers. What we have is hope, and a down payment, and a promise of better things to come. What we have now is just a baby in comparison to the glory that God will give us later.

We might look at ourselves and think, I don't see much here. I'm not much better than I was 20 years ago. I still struggle with sin, doubt and guilt. I am still selfish and stubborn. I am not much better at being a godly person than ancient Israel was. I wonder if God is really doing anything in my life. It doesn't seem like I've made any progress.

The answer is to remember Jesus. Our spiritual beginning may not seem good for much right now, but it is, because God says it is. What we have in us is only a down payment. It is a

beginning, and it is a guarantee from God himself. The Holy Spirit in us is a down payment of glory yet to come.

Luke tells us that the angels sang when Jesus was born. It was a moment of triumph, even though humans couldn't see it that way. The angels knew that victory was certain, because God had told them so.

Jesus tells us that the angels rejoice whenever a sinner repents. They are singing for every person who comes to faith in Christ,

because a baby has been born. That baby might not perform very well. It might have many struggles, but it is a child of God, and God will see to it that His work is done. He will take care of us. Though our spiritual lives are not perfect, God will keep working in us until His work is done.

Just as there is tremendous hope in the baby Jesus, there is tremendous hope in the baby Christian. No matter how long you have been a Christian, there is tremendous hope for you, because God has invested in you, and He will not abandon the work He has begun. □

¹ Genesis 3:15

² Isaiah 7:14

³ John 8:41

⁴ Luke 2:11

It only happened

An eminent philosopher had given a very stimulating and eloquent lecture at a university on the meaning of life. A young student then asked him, “But what happens at death?” He responded, “I don’t know, I have never died.” It was clever, and everyone laughed. But the young student pushed him again. “How can we understand life if we cannot understand death?” This time he replied, “The only way we would ever know is if someone died and then came back to life to tell us.”

The fellow student who was told of this event, said, “Suddenly I saw the extraordinary power of the claim of the Christian faith.” Jesus Christ, the Son of God and a man who shared fully our human life, was raised from the dead, with all the proof needed by Jewish law to verify it, thereby giving us an insight into a world that exists beyond this life, and an invitation to be a part of it. Wow! Now that is HOPE!

But the events leading to this remarkable—and to this point—unique event were anything but filled with hope. For Jesus’ disciples, the events surrounding his crucifixion can only be described as a spreading cloud of all-pervading gloom.

Even during the meal that they had with him the night before his death, more than enough odd things happened:

- Jesus washed their feet like the servants did—but in the *middle* of the meal!
- Peter got gently rebuked (well, he was a rather spontaneous and at times impulsive man).
- Judas left them in the middle of the meal without saying why.
- Jesus insisted that the disciples join him in a little more bread and wine and then likened it to his body and blood—weird! After all, Jewish law specified that only the flesh of certain animals could be eaten—and they certainly couldn’t drink a drop of blood from any creature.

When the meal was finished, they all (well, except Judas, and

by
**Rod
Matthews**

only Jesus knew where he had gone) went out into the garden of Gethsemane, and Jesus prayed long and hard, but the disciples fell asleep. Remember, they had just had a very good meal with wine.

Then suddenly, Jesus was accosted by a mob—led by Judas! And Peter drew a sword to defend Jesus. Peter’s rather wild swing with the sword actually cut off the ear of the High Priest’s servant—which fell on the ground. (I don’t think he aimed for the ear!) I suppose the wound naturally bled a lot too. Jesus picked up the ear and did some instant microsurgery—and then rebuked Peter... again! (I wonder how the High Priest’s servant, who went home to his wife or family later that night with both ears intact but with blood all down his cloak, tried to explain what happened?) Then Jesus was led away by the Roman soldiers and the disciples fled into the safety of the darkness.

Jesus was arraigned before a night meeting of the Sanhedrin. He was beaten up. Peter sneaked in close in a timid display of support,

or perhaps curiosity, but found himself denying Jesus three times very vehemently.

All this happened at night—in darkness. For the world it was a



very dark time—and it led in a few hours to the darkest time in the history of the world.

The next morning Jesus was crucified—and again the

ed once... so far!

circumstances were quite frightening. By mid-afternoon, as he approached death, there was a unique, unexplainable mid-afternoon darkness—and a



terrifying earthquake.

The temple priests who were at that moment involved in the sacrificing of the Passover lambs were astonished—and probably

petrified—when the darkness came and the earthquake struck and, in spectacular symbolism that they could not yet understand, the temple veil separating the holy

place from the Holy of Holies was ripped in half from top to bottom!

And where were the disciples? We only know that John watched the crucifixion from a distance with Jesus' mother and other women friends. The others? I doubt they want us to know! Dismayed, confused, bewildered, despairing and probably scattered. How could three marvellous years end like this?

This pall of sorrow and shame was deepened by their own complicity in his death—because they had abandoned him in his time of need in spite of their previous bravado. Both Peter and Thomas are recorded as having said that they would be willing to die with him. In Jesus' death so had their hope died. The dream he had instilled in them of a marvellous mission, and

a conquering kingdom had dissipated at the cross.

And buried in all of these events is an incredible irony:

What particular event prompted

the religious authorities to seek out Jesus to arrest and kill Him? Lazarus's miraculous resurrection from the dead! It is recorded in John 11:37–53.

If the masses followed Jesus, then the religious leaders were afraid the fragile political arrangement with Rome would fall apart. Even if He was a mystery and impossible for them to understand, and even if He just might be a prophet, He was still a threat to national stability. So they killed Him to put an end to His influence. He died and a murderer was let loose on society instead—and later the Romans destroyed the nation anyway.

Because Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead to physical life again, the authorities pursued His death.

Because Jesus died and was raised to life again, we can die to Him and live again... forever.

On the following Sunday morning, the first to see Jesus were women. But their eye-witness report was not believed by the disciples, naturally perhaps because it had not happened before, and besides, in Jewish society then women were counted as unreliable witnesses in a legal sense anyway.

(Josephus, the Jewish historian, wrote, "from women let no evidence be accepted because of the levity and temerity of their sex".)

But Jesus, even in the events surrounding His death, was still concerned about the welfare of others and fully intended to address this social injustice.

He revealed Himself to women first! Then He had the men confirm the veracity of the women's report. "And still they did not understand from scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead."¹

Then Jesus started a "personal appearance campaign", to:

- Mary Magdalene (another woman!)
- Two of Jesus followers who were travelling on the road to Emmaus
- Peter—not described but recorded by Luke in 24:34. (I suspect Jesus knew that Peter would need some personal

encouragement after his denial and desertion!)

- Ten disciples in the upper room.
- Then another 5 times in the next 40 days—including to 500 at one time.²

So at least 550 people saw and verified that He was alive after His resurrection. It was—and still is—a truly unique event in human history!

It was studied with eye-witness accounts as required by Jewish law³ to verify an event. Later several of those disciples then recorded their experience in writing for posterity. The disciples spoke with credibility and authority which the religious leaders could not legally dispute. And the Roman soldiers assigned to guard the tomb could only confirm that the body had gone.

There, in the living, walking, appearing and disappearing Jesus, was the living proof, the reality, that there is “life after death”.

Remember, at this time the Jews were about to celebrate their historical escape from ‘death’ in Egypt which had occurred well over a thousand years previously. Their festival was to remind them of:

- The death angel passing over them in Egypt.
- The haste in leaving with the spoils taken from the shell-shocked Egyptians.
- The trap at the edge of the Red Sea with the water in front of them and the hills to the left and right, and the Egyptian army coming up behind them in fast chariots.
- The miraculous escape across a divided Red Sea on the dry seabed, which then became soggy enough to bog the Egyptian chariots (a journey symbolic of baptism).
- The miraculous sustaining in the desert from the bread from heaven (manna) and living water coming from impossible places (the Rock).
- And then a miraculous repeat of these types of miracles as they entered the promised land 40+ years later.

It is worth noting that in Egypt it was ultimately the death of the firstborn (of Egypt) that enabled the Israelites to escape and be saved, and pointed to the fact that it would be the death of the firstborn son of God—and of Mary—that would save us all.

As Christ walked and talked with His followers after his resurrection, the remarkable parallels from the Israelites own history was starting to dawn in the minds of the disciples. If they thought about it, they could see that the physical rescue from Egypt foreshadowed their own spiritual rescue from sin and its enslavement through the work of God and His Son.

And on that Sunday when Jesus was resurrected, the disciples and the women were running around trying to ascertain what had happened to the body and remembering the strange things Jesus had said at various times. With reports coming in of people who had encountered Him, their elation grew and their hope and amazement—and perhaps their moments of disbelief—and then proof of Jesus’ resurrection and fulfilment of scripture became certain.

It was the very morning when the priests were getting ready to celebrate the offering of the “wave sheaf” to thank God for the first produce from the spring harvest season, symbolising that no one could benefit from the harvest until the first sheaf of grain had been offered and accepted of God.

Now the disciples were invigorated, encouraged and filled with anticipation, and they obeyed by waiting as Jesus had commanded. The doubting ceased and the depression left. And things started to make sense. And they really came to believe Him!

Soon—in a few weeks’ time—they were filled with the Holy Spirit and risking imprisonment and even death as they powerfully preached Jesus and the resurrection—“With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and much grace was given to them all.”⁴

Everyone who has lived to this time has died, or will die, including our Lord. A rare few have died and been restored temporarily to physical life—Jesus Himself raised only three people from the dead when He walked on earth as a human being. Of course, thousands since then have been rescued from certain death and their physical life extended by medical skills. But only one has been resurrected to immortality!

Today we have the privilege

of having personal access to the records of the witnesses whose personal experiences testify to that fact. And Christians also testify that in our personal experience we have experienced the risen Christ in our lives, and we, too, look forward to immortality as pioneered by our Saviour.⁵

Jesus’ resurrection is the greatest event ever to happen in the history of humanity:

- It foreshadows what awaits us.
- It delivers us from this “present evil age”.⁶
- We become a new creation; the old has passed away.⁷
- We are guaranteed a future resurrection.⁸
- Our lowly bodies will be transformed into a glorious body like Christ’s.⁹

The promise is outlined in Romans 6:5, 8–11: “If we have been united with Him in His death, we will certainly be united with Him in His resurrection. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him. The death He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

The resurrection of Jesus is the pivotal event in history. It is, to this point in time, truly unique. But it won’t stay that way forever. And it could not have occurred without Jesus’ death. The death of Christ foreshadowed the end of the mortal and His resurrection the possibility of immortality.

It is the evidence that there is indeed life beyond the grave. It is the hope of the dead and the living.

“When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’ Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your work is not in vain.”¹⁰ □

¹ John 20:9

² 1 Corinthians 15:6

³ Deuteronomy 19:15

⁴ Acts 4:33

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:20–23

⁶ Galatians 1:4

⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:17

⁸ 1 Corinthians 6:14

⁹ Philippians 3:21

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:54, 58

A lesson about envy

The Bible tells us that Jesus was made like His fellow humans in every way.¹ In this passage we find that like many of our families, Jesus' family was ready to have Him committed. They came down to "take charge" of Him, believing Him to be out of His mind.

Blindness of envy

Among the reasons Jesus was considered out of His mind, Mark informs us, was that Jesus was running afoul of the authorities. He was banishing demons from people, and the authorities, who apparently weren't, found Jesus' growing popularity most irritating.

It is a little reminiscent of Saul's jealousy over David's military success recorded in 1 Samuel 18. You might think a king would be grateful for the victories of a top general. But not so—Saul saw David as a threat. He feared the people might get the idea that David would make a better king.

The same dynamics seem to be at work between Jesus and the authorities. Jesus was getting too popular. His power over the evil spirits was plain, which made it obvious to everyone that He had the blessing and power of God.

So the authorities saw Jesus not as a blessing, but as a threat. Jesus was better liked than they were. And He was clearly more powerful.

So what to do? Discredit Him, of course. But how? Well, let's see—suppose we tell the people that He has power over the demons because He is demon-possessed Himself. Yes! That's the ticket! The man is demon-possessed, and not just by any demon, but this Jesus whom you are cheering is possessed by Beelzebub himself!

Truth aside

Truth was not the governing factor. God's will was not a consideration. The joy of those freed from wicked oppression didn't matter. There was only one goal—discredit anyone who makes us feel



by
**Michael
Fezell**

insecure. Say whatever has to be said.

The accusation, of course, was absurd, and Jesus exposed it as such. "If Satan opposes himself and is divided," Jesus said, "He cannot stand; His end has come."

But Jesus' remark was deeper than merely exposing the silliness of the authorities' accusation. The truth was, Satan's end had come, but not because Beelzebub was kicking out demons through Jesus.

The end of Satan's kingdom had begun because the Son of God had walked onto the stage of history.

is in Jesus Christ (which is the same thing as walking in the light), we have fellowship with one another. This is a fellowship that breaks through the walls of self-centered living. People matter to us.

Jesus told the disciples: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."³ Just as light overpowers darkness, so love leaves no place for selfish envy.

Jesus was not a person to the authorities. He was an obstacle, a

For Reflection

Has someone received a blessing you felt should have come to you? How have you responded?

How have you treated that person?

Have you been mistreated recently?

How have you coped with it?

Have you asked God for his peace?

Jesus continued: "In fact, no one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house." Jesus was freeing people from demons because Satan had no power to stop Him.

And the authorities knew that. They were not blind. They saw the works of deliverance. But it is possible, even for us, to become so selfishly oriented that we place the preservation of our personal goals above even the hand of God.

Redemption

John wrote, "But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin."² When our trust

faceless object to be cleared out of their path. He didn't matter. Have you ever been treated that way? Take heart: Jesus travelled that path before you. He knows what you're experiencing.

Have you ever treated someone else that way? Take heart: Jesus has forgiven you. And if you will receive it, He gives you a heart that can see people as people, not as obstacles in your path. Let's agree to take a look at the relationships in our lives. If there is someone we've been disparaging, maybe it's time to take our concerns to Christ the Redeemer instead of the grapevine. □

¹ Hebrews 2:17

² 1 John 1:7

³ John 13:34–35

Why did Jesus

Do you feel that God is unfair in allowing Jesus to die for our sins? It seems very cruel that Jesus had to be nailed to a cross and die like a common criminal.

We can understand why a person may suffer for his or her own sins. But why should another person like Jesus have to suffer for us?

Penalty for sin in this life

In this life, sin causes hurt and suffering to ourselves and to others. Sometimes this is easy to see. Perhaps a person is murdered. This causes suffering to the person killed, as well as to the person's family and friends.

When the murderers are caught

**by
David
Hefferman**

shame and suffering to the family members. Even if the murderers are not caught, their life may not be free from worry. They are always concerned that one day evidence will be found and they will be arrested. This has caused so much suffering due to guilty feelings that some murderers have later given



To answer this question we need to understand the penalty of sin. In the Christian Bible, sin is disobeying God's will. The penalty for sin can occur at two levels—there are penalties in this life and penalties in the life which comes after death.

and convicted, they may go to jail for a long time. They may even be executed. They get the punishment the law of the land says they deserve. The same can happen to people who deal in illegal drugs. Both cases also bring

themselves up to the police and confessed.

At other times, the penalty is different. Perhaps a person steals from another. This causes suffering to the person who has lost his possessions. But what about the

have to die?

thief? Sometimes people know who the thief is even if they cannot prove he is guilty. This can cause hatred and may lead to revenge. The thief may end up very unhappy and may live in fear.

People sometimes think they can get away with sins when they are not caught. Suppose you commit adultery. No one finds out and you think you have paid no penalty. Is that true? The Christian Bible tells us this is not the case. The Apostle Paul tells us that a person “who sins sexually sins against his own body.”¹ There is a penalty to pay. Adultery destroys the loving relationship between a husband and wife. It also quietly undermines the family, causing hurt to the children too. If adultery continues, conscience is seared. People come to think of it as not sinful any more. The adultery continues to eat away at the family relationships. There is a subtle but serious penalty to pay.

Sometimes we do not easily see the penalty for a sin. But it is always there. Sins cause suffering in this life—to ourselves and to others.

Penalty for sin in the life to come

Any time we disobey God we sin. Jesus told us to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”² No human being does that!

Even sins against other people are sins against God. Jesus also told us to “love your neighbour as yourself.”³ If we do things which hurt and harm others, we are actually sinning against God. This is why the Bible tells us that “there is no one righteous, not even one.”⁴

Some people, however, think they are not that bad. They can make a long list of all the good things they have done recently. They seem to believe that if they carry out good deeds they can earn merit with God. Because of these good deeds, they believe, after death they will be rewarded. But this is not what the Bible tells

us. Good deeds in the Bible are sometimes called “works”. Will good ‘works’ help us earn salvation and life after death? No—we are told we are saved “not by works, so that no one can boast.”⁵ So boasting about all the good things we have done will get us nowhere.

Sadly, even our best deeds are tainted. Suppose we give a large amount of money to people in need. We may have desired to help others—and that is good. But did we carry out this good deed perfectly? Perhaps we also partly did it for show—so that other people could see how good we were. Perhaps we did it so that we could get a tax deduction. Perhaps we gave out of our wealth and no real sacrifice was involved.

That does not mean we should not carry out good deeds. The Bible tells us we were “created in Christ Jesus to do good works.”⁶ Rather, we must always remember that our good deeds are never perfect. And because they are not perfect, they do not earn merit with God. So “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”⁷ Since “the wages of sin is death”⁸, we all face a serious problem. How will this penalty be paid?

It is because of these sins against God that Jesus died on the cross. Jesus paid the penalty in our place: “Christ died for our sin.”⁹ As a result, God says, “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”¹⁰

And what do we have to do to deserve all this? Nothing! It is a free gift from God.

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”¹¹

To receive this “gift from God” and be “saved”, however, there are a number of steps given that we must follow.¹² First, a person must repent of his or her sins. This means that he is deeply sorry for the bad ways he has treated God and his fellow human beings.

Second, the person must declare

his faith in Jesus and accept His sacrifice for his sins. Third, the person is then baptised as a symbol of the acceptance of the washing away of his sins. Fourth, hands are then laid upon him so that he receives the Holy Spirit.

The penalty for sin has now been paid: “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”¹³

Lingering penalty for sin

As far as God is concerned, there is “no condemnation” for those who have become Christians. Does that mean there is no penalty at all?

Suppose a person is a murderer. He is condemned to eternal death by God. He has also been condemned to a physical death by the courts. If that murderer repents, then he is forgiven by God. The death of Jesus on the cross pays his penalty.

But does that remove the penalty of that sin in this life? King David committed adultery with Bathsheba and then murdered her husband Uriah. You can read the story in 2 Samuel 11 and 12. Even though David repented and was forgiven by God, it did not remove the penalty. The baby who was born as a result of the adultery died. This caused much suffering—not only to the baby but to both David and Bathsheba.

The same can happen today. A person may become a Christian as he awaits execution for murder. The death of Jesus on the cross pays the penalty for sin as far as God is concerned. Their salvation is assured. However, they may still have to die physically to pay the penalty of the suffering they have caused to others.

Why then did Jesus have to die?

It was not to remove the penalty because of our sins in this physical life. Jesus died on the cross so that we can be forgiven for sins against God. God can then share eternity with people such as you and me. □

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:18

² Matthew 22:37

³ Matthew 22:39

⁴ Romans 3:10

⁵ Ephesians 2:9

⁶ Ephesians 2:10

⁷ Romans 3:23

⁸ Romans 6:23

⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:3

¹⁰ Hebrews 10:17

¹¹ Ephesians 2:8

¹² Acts 2:37–39

¹³ Romans 8:1

To die for Christ

Mary and I were walking home from church service one day, when she suddenly pronounced: “We are all going to be martyred.” My heart sank. I heard myself pleading silently: “But God, I’ve just become a Christian and I am only 18.” Surely God would understand and would not require me to sacrifice my life like the way Jesus did—a painful and humiliating death. Years passed by swiftly since that ‘prophetic’ statement and I learned that I still had to die.

Denying yourself

Jesus said in Luke 9:23–24, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.” Jesus wasn’t saying that we must all die a torturous death. He was referring to the act of putting to death our self-will and unreservedly submitting to God’s will.

Denying myself things like food, water and certain pleasures for a period of time, as in fasting or slimming is tough but manageable. What is tougher for me is the consistent, spontaneous cheerful giving of myself, my time, my energy for others and sharing my possessions and hard-earned money with them. Simply because, oftentimes it seems I do not gain or profit from this outpouring of myself for others. But Jesus gave Himself—in fact He gave His life for humanity. He expects us to do likewise if we are to be His true disciples. Luke 9:23–24 could well be viewed this way:

- *If anyone would come after me:* there exists a choice to be or not to be followers of Christ.
- *he must deny himself:* a willingness to give up the ‘self’ (plans, dreams and ambitions) completely over to God for His purpose.
- *and take up his cross daily:* a habitual, continual dying of self-will as opposed to God’s will.
- *and follow me:* follow His example of service to others.

Jesus and His disciples were willing to die in service to others

because of their love and hope for humanity. As a result, the history of the world has taken a different course. It doesn’t matter how young or old you are, God will use you if you are willing to be His instrument of change for the betterment or benefit of someone else.

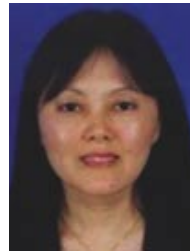
Can we trust God with our life?

Saint Paul said that what is seen is temporary and what is unseen eternal.¹ God is eternal² and all-knowing³. He knows our struggles to deny our hearts’ desires—putting our ‘unknown’ future in the hands of an ‘unseen’ God.⁴ It is easier to trust our living God with our life when we realise how much He loves us. Our salvation is bought at a price.⁵ It costs God the life of His one and only Son, Jesus Christ. That is how much God loves us.⁶

Our spiritual journey is a lifelong process of learning and changing. We will stumble occasionally but it is not fatal. Look at Saint Peter. He had personally experienced the life, teachings and miracles of Jesus Christ for 3 years. He promised Jesus that he would follow Him, even if it meant death.⁷ Later, while facing overwhelming pressures, he denied Jesus three times.⁸ But Saint Peter didn’t give up, only because Jesus didn’t give up on him. Saint Peter was challenged to consider how far and deep his love was for Jesus. Jesus assisted Peter to overcome his doubts about his love for Him.⁹ Soon after, Saint Peter boldly proclaimed the gospel and many people trusted in Jesus. What about us? Will we continue to trust and love God? We must want to follow Christ out of love for Him—in gratitude for all that He has done for us.

Rewards

When we opt to live a life wholly yielded to God, it will often mean doing the opposite of what we feel like doing. It can be costly, testy, embarrassing, inconvenient, even unpopular. If we are true to Him (not just lip service) He will be



by
Stefanie Tai

true to us in eternity.¹⁰

Even now, we can enjoy His peace in the midst of life’s uncertainties—rising costs of living, rampant crime, extreme weather changes, natural disasters of catastrophic proportion, outbreak of killer diseases, increased hostilities between people and nations.

I am reminded of a true story I saw on television. A young man lived his life in and out of prison for small-time robberies. Hoping to lead him out of the wrong path he had chosen, the prison warden handed him a Bible. Pushing the Bible aside, the young man sneered at the prison warden and said: “Has God made you rich?” The prison warden smiled and gave an honest reply: “No. God has not made me rich. But God has given me peace. And God makes sure I am out of the prison cell, while you are inside the cell.” The arrogant know-it-all young man went on to big-time robberies, escaped from being caught and enjoyed his stolen ‘pots-of-gold’ for some time. Eventually the arms of the law caught up with him. In the prison cell one night, he felt lost, exhausted, and rejected. Realising that his meaningless life was not getting him anywhere, he broke down bitterly. With the help of the prison warden, he gave up his life and ‘aligned’ his human nature with God’s spiritual nature. Though he and the prison warden did not become rich, they had peace that comes from above and which is not of this world.¹¹ The young man later became a pastor. He involved himself wholeheartedly in prison-ministry and managed to help several inmates accept Christ. By his ‘death’ to his old way of life, new lives are being led to Christ.

God can transform our loss and tragedies into triumphs¹² if we will learn to step aside, wait and see how He is going to use our circumstances for His glory. So take heart. Our loss and sufferings in this life will not be in vain for God has promised that “... whoever loses his life for me will save it.”¹³ □

¹ 2 Corinthians 4:18

² Romans 1:20

³ Isaiah 46:10

⁴ Psalm 103:14

⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:20

⁶ John 3:16

⁷ Matthew 26:31–35

⁸ Matthew 26:69–75

⁹ John 21:15–19

¹⁰ Ephesians 6:6–8; Colossians 3:22–24

¹¹ Romans 8:6

¹² Luke 22:31–32

¹³ Luke 9:24

If I were the Devil

If I were the Devil...

- I would gain control of the most powerful nation in the world;*
- I would delude their minds into thinking that they had come from man's effort, instead of God's blessings;*
- I would promote an attitude of loving things and using people, instead of the other way around;*
- I would dupe entire states into relying on gambling for their state revenue;*
- I would convince people that character is not an issue when it comes to leadership;*
- I would make it legal to take the life of unborn babies;*
- I would make it socially acceptable to take one's own life, and invent machines to make it convenient;*
- I would cheapen human life as much as possible so that the life of animals are valued more than human beings;*
- I would take God out of the schools, where even the mention of His name was grounds for a law suit;*
- I would come up with drugs that sedate the mind and target the young, and I would get sports heroes to advertise them;*
- I would get control of the media, so that every night I could pollute the mind of every family member for my agenda;*
- I would attack the family, the backbone of any nation;*
- I would make divorce acceptable and easy, even fashionable. If the family crumbles, so does the nation;*
- I would compel people to express their most depraved fantasies on canvas and movie screens, and I would call it art;*
- I would convince the world that people are born homosexuals, and that their lifestyles should be accepted and marvelled;*
- I would convince the people that right and wrong are determined by a few who call themselves authorities and refer to their agenda as politically correct;*
- I would persuade people that the church is irrelevant and out of date, and the Bible is for the naive;*
- I would dull the minds of Christians, and make them believe that prayer is not important, and that faithfulness and obedience are optional;*
- I guess I would leave things pretty much the way they are.*

By Paul Harvey



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.**

Who is

Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” The question confronts us, too: Who is this man? What authority does He have? Why should we trust Him?

The Christian faith centers on Jesus Christ. We need to understand what kind of person He is.

Fully human—and then some

Jesus was born in the normal way, grew up in the normal way, got hungry and thirsty and tired, ate and drank and slept. He looked normal,

But Jesus was such an extraordinary human that after He ascended to heaven, some people claimed He was not human after all.² They thought that Jesus was so holy that surely He would have nothing to do with flesh, with its dirt, sweat, digestive functions and imperfections. Perhaps He merely appeared to be human, in the way that angels sometimes appeared as humans, without actually becoming human.

So the New Testament makes

by
Michael Morrison

Him and touched Him.⁵

Paul said that Jesus was “made in human likeness”⁶, “born under the law”⁷, “in the likeness of sinful man”⁸. Since He came to save humans, the author of Hebrews reasons, it was necessary that He “shared in their humanity”⁹.

Our salvation depends on the reality of Jesus’ humanity. His role as our intercessor, our high priest, depends on His experience as a human.¹⁰ Even after His resurrection, Jesus had flesh and



talked in ordinary language, and walked in the normal way. He had emotions like compassion, surprise, sorrow and apprehension.¹ He prayed to God, as humans need to. He called Himself a man and other people called Him a man. He was a human.

it clear that Jesus was really a human. John tells us, “The Word became flesh.”³ He didn’t just appear as flesh, or clothe Himself in flesh. He became flesh. “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.”⁴ We know, says John, because we saw

bones.¹¹ Even in heavenly glory, He continues to be a human.¹²

Acting like God

“Who is this fellow?” asked the Pharisees when they heard Jesus forgive sins. “Who can forgive

Jesus?

sins but God alone?”¹³ Sin is an offence against God, so how could a human speak for God and say the offence is taken off the record? It was blasphemy, they said. Jesus knew what they thought about it, but He forgave sins anyway. He even implied that He had no sins of His own.¹⁴ He made some astonishing claims:

- He said He would sit at God’s right hand in heaven—another claim the Jewish leaders thought blasphemous.¹⁵
- He claimed to be the Son of God—another blasphemy, they said, since in that culture it implied equality with God.¹⁶
- Jesus claimed to be in such perfect communication with God that He did only what God wanted.¹⁷
- He claimed to be one with the Father¹⁸, which the Jewish leaders again said was blasphemous.¹⁹
- He claimed to be so much like God that people should look at Him to see the Father.²⁰
- He claimed to be able to send God’s Spirit.²¹
- He claimed that He had angels He could send.²²
- He knew that God was the judge of the world, but He also claimed to be the judge.²³
- He said He could raise the dead, even Himself.²⁴
- He said that everyone’s eternal life depended on their relationship with Him.²⁵
- He said that the words of Moses were not enough.²⁶
- He claimed to be the Lord of the Sabbath—the Lord of a God-given law!²⁷

If He were merely a human, His teaching was arrogant and sinful. But Jesus backed up His words with some amazing works. “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles.”²⁸ Miracles can’t force anyone to believe, but they can provide powerful supporting

- ¹ Matthew 9:36; Luke 7:9; John 11:38; Matthew 26:37
- ² 2 John 7
- ³ John 1:14
- ⁴ 1 John 4:2
- ⁵ 1 John 1:1–2
- ⁶ Philippians 2:7
- ⁷ Galatians 4:4
- ⁸ Romans 8:3
- ⁹ Hebrews 2:14–17
- ¹⁰ Hebrews 4:15
- ¹¹ John 20:27; Luke 24:39
- ¹² 1 Timothy 2:5
- ¹³ Luke 5:21
- ¹⁴ John 8:46
- ¹⁵ Matthew 26:63–65
- ¹⁶ John 5:18; 19:7
- ¹⁷ John 5:19
- ¹⁸ John 10:30
- ¹⁹ John 10:33
- ²⁰ John 14:9; 1:18
- ²¹ John 16:7
- ²² Mathew 13:41
- ²³ John 5:22
- ²⁴ John 5:21; 6:40; 10:18
- ²⁵ Mathew 7:23
- ²⁶ Mathew 5:21–48
- ²⁷ Matthew 12:8
- ²⁸ John 14:11
- ²⁹ Luke 5: 23–25
- ³⁰ Luke 2:49
- ³¹ Luke 3:22
- ³² Luke 4:43; 9:22; 13:33; 22:37
- ³³ Mathew 16:16–17
- ³⁴ Isaiah 53:4–5, 12; Matthew 26:24; Mark 9:12; Luke 22:37; 24:46
- ³⁵ Zechariah 9:9–10; Matthew 21:1–9
- ³⁶ Daniel 7: 13–14; Matthew 26:64
- ³⁷ John 8: 58

evidence.

To show that he had the authority to forgive sins, Jesus healed a paralysed man.²⁹ His miracles give evidence that what He said about Himself is true. He has more-than-human power, because He is more than a human. The claims that would have been blasphemous in anyone else were true for Jesus. He could speak like God and act like God because He was God in the flesh.

Who did He think He was?

Jesus had a clear sense of self-identity. Even at age 12, He had a special relationship with His Father in heaven.³⁰ At His baptism, He heard a voice from heaven say that He was God’s Son.³¹ He knew He had a mission to perform.³²

When Peter said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus answered, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”³³ Jesus was the Son of God. He was the Christ, the Messiah—the person uniquely anointed by God for a special mission.

When Jesus called the 12 disciples, one for each tribe of Israel, He did not count Himself among the 12. He was above them, for He was above all Israel. He was the maker and builder of the new Israel. At the last Supper, He proclaimed Himself to be the basis of the new covenant, a new relationship with God. He saw Himself as the focal point of what God was doing in the world.

Jesus spoke boldly against traditions, against laws, against the temple, against religious leaders. He demanded that his followers abandon everything to follow Him, to put Him first in their lives, to give Him complete allegiance. He spoke with the authority of God—but He spoke on His own authority.

Jesus believed that He was the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. He was the suffering servant who would die to ransom

the people from their sins.³⁴ He was the king of peace who would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey.³⁵ He was the Son of man who would be given all power and authority.³⁶

Previous life

Jesus claimed to be alive before Abraham was born: “I tell you the truth,” He said, “before Abraham was born, I am!”³⁷ The Jewish leaders thought that Jesus was claiming something divine, and they wanted to stone Him to death. The phrase “I AM” is an echo of Exodus 3:14, where God revealed His name to Moses: “This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” Jesus used this name for Himself.

Jesus said He shared glory with God before the world began.³⁸ John tells us that He existed even in the beginning of time, as the Word.³⁹ John tells us that the universe was made through the Word.⁴⁰ The Father was the Designer, and the Word was the Creator who carried out the design. “All things were created by him and for him.”⁴¹ Hebrews 1:2 says that God made the universe through the Son.

Both Hebrews and Colossians tell us that the Son sustains the universe.⁴² Both tell us that He is “the image of the invisible God”⁴³, “the exact representation of His being.”⁴⁴

Who is Jesus? He is a divine being who became flesh. He was in the beginning with God; He was the creator of all, the author of life.⁴⁵ He looks exactly like God, has glory like God, and has powers that only God has. Little wonder that the disciples concluded that He was God, even in the flesh.

Worthy of worship

Jesus was conceived in a supernatural way.⁴⁶ He lived without ever sinning.⁴⁷ He was blameless, without impurity.⁴⁸ He committed no sin⁴⁹; in Him there was no sin⁵⁰; He knew no sin.⁵¹ No matter how tempting the sin was, Jesus always had a greater desire to obey God. His mission was to do God’s will.⁵²

On several occasions, people

worshiped Jesus.⁵³ Angels refused worship⁵⁴, but Jesus did not. Indeed, even the angels worship the Son of God.⁵⁵ Some prayers are addressed to Jesus.⁵⁶ He is worthy of worship.

The New Testament gives elaborate praises to Jesus Christ, with doxologies that are normally reserved for God: "To Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen."⁵⁷ He has the highest title that can ever be given.⁵⁸ Even if we call Him God, that title is not too high. In Revelation, equal praise is given to God and to the Lamb, implying equality: "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"⁵⁹ The Son must be given equal honor with the Father.⁶⁰ Both God and Jesus are called the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and end of everything.⁶¹

The New Testament often uses Old Testament passages about God and applies them to Jesus Christ. One of the most striking is this passage about worship: "God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."⁶² Jesus will get the honor and respect that Isaiah said would be given to God.

Isaiah says there is only one Savior—God.⁶³ Paul just as clearly says that God is Savior and Jesus is Savior.⁶⁴ So, is there one Savior, or two? Early Christians concluded that the Father is God and Jesus is God, even though there is only one God, only one Savior. The Father and Son are the same in essence (God), but different in person.

Several other New Testament verses also call Jesus God. John 1:1 says, "the Word was God." Verse 18 says, "No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known." Jesus is the God who made the Father known. After the resurrection, Thomas recognised Jesus as God: Thomas said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"⁶⁵

Paul says that the patriarchs are great because "from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen."⁶⁶ In Hebrews, God Himself is said to call Jesus God: "About the Son He says, 'Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever.'"⁶⁷

"In Christ," Paul said, "all the

fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."⁶⁸ Jesus Christ is fully divine, and even now has bodily form.

He is the exact representation of God—God made flesh. If Jesus were only a human, it would be wrong to put our trust in Him. But because He is divine, we are *commanded* to trust in Him. He is utterly trustworthy, because He is God.

However, it can be misleading to say "Jesus is God," as if there were a simple equality between the two words. For one, Jesus was also a man, and secondly, Jesus is not all of God. We cannot say that "God is Jesus". In most cases, "God" means "the Father", and that is why the Bible so rarely calls Jesus God. But the word can legitimately be used for Jesus, for Jesus is divine. As the Son of God, He is a person in the triune Godhead. Jesus is the unique person in which God and humanity are joined.

The divinity of Jesus is crucial for us, for only if He is divine could He accurately reveal God to us.⁶⁹ Only a divine person could forgive our sins, redeem us, and reconcile us to God. Only a divine person could be the object of our faith, the Lord to whom we give complete allegiance, the Savior we worship in song and prayer.

Truly human, truly God

As you can see from the scripture references cited above, the biblical information about Jesus is scattered throughout the New Testament. The picture is consistent, but it is not all drawn together in one place. The early church had to put the facts together. They drew these conclusions from the biblical revelation:

- Jesus, the Son of God, is genuinely divine.
- The Son of God became genuinely human, but the Father did not.
- The Son of God and the Father are distinct, not the same.
- There is only one God.
- The Son and the Father are persons in that one God.

The council of Nicea (A.D. 325) declared that Jesus, the Son of God, was divine, of the same essence as the Father. The council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451) explained that he was also human:

Our Lord Jesus Christ is one and

the same Son; the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man ... begotten of the Father before all ages as regards His Godhead and... begotten of the Virgin Mary the Theotokos as regards His manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures... the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union but the property of each nature being preserved and coalescing in one person.

The last part was included because some people said that the divine nature so overpowered Jesus' human nature that He wasn't really human. Others said that the two natures combined to form a third nature, so that Jesus was neither human nor divine. No, the biblical data says that He was truly human, and truly divine, and this is what the church must say, too.

How can this be?

Our salvation depends on Jesus being both human and divine. But how can this be? How can someone infinite become finite? How can the holy Son of God become a human, in the likeness of sinful flesh?

Our question comes mainly because the only humanity that we can see now is woefully corrupt. But this is not the way God made it. Jesus shows us what true humanity is. For one thing, He shows us a person who is completely dependent on the Father. This is the way humanity ought to be.

Jesus also shows us what God is capable of doing. He is able to become part of His creation. He can bridge the gap between the uncreated and the created, between the holy and the sinful. What we might think is impossible, is possible with God. Jesus also shows us what humanity will be in the new creation. When He returns and we are resurrected, we will look like Him.⁷⁰ We will have bodies like His glorious body.⁷¹

Jesus is our trailblazer, showing us that the way to God is through Jesus. Because He is human, He sympathises with our weaknesses, and because He is divine, He effectively intercedes for us at God's right hand. With Jesus as our Savior, we can be confident that our salvation is secure. □

³⁸ John 17:5

³⁹ John 1:1

⁴⁰ John 1:3

⁴¹ Colossians 1:16;
1 Corinthians 8:6

⁴² Hebrews 1:3;
Colossians 1:17

⁴³ Colossians 1:15

⁴⁴ Hebrews 1:3

⁴⁵ Acts 3:15

⁴⁶ Matthew 1:20;
Luke 1:35

⁴⁷ Hebrews 4:15

⁴⁸ Hebrews 7:26;
9:14

⁴⁹ 1 Peter 2:22

⁵⁰ 1 John 3:5

⁵¹ 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁵² Hebrews 10:7

⁵³ Matthew 14:33;
28:9, 17; John 9:38

⁵⁴ Revelation 19:
10

⁵⁵ Hebrews 1:6

⁵⁶ Acts 7:59–60; 2
Corinthians 12:
8; Revelation
22:20

⁵⁷ 2 Timothy 4:18;
2 Peter 3:18;
Revelation 1:6

⁵⁸ Ephesians 1:
20–21

⁵⁹ Revelation 5:13

⁶⁰ John 5:23

⁶¹ Revelation 1:
8,17; 21:6, 22:13

⁶² Philippians 2:
9–11

⁶³ Isaiah 43:11;
45:21

⁶⁴ Titus 1:3–4; 2:
10, 13

⁶⁵ John 20:28

⁶⁶ Romans 9:5

⁶⁷ Hebrews 1:8

⁶⁸ Colossians 2:9

⁶⁹ John 1:18; 14:9

⁷⁰ 1 John 3:2

⁷¹ 1 Corinthians
15:42–49

For sinners only

Christians are often criticised for being sinners, imperfect, unholy, and hypocritical. How true that is! It's an accurate assessment. In fact, Christianity is for sinners. Jesus said so Himself: "For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."¹

My church experience

When I first attended church I felt out of place, unworthy, and wondered if I really belonged there. It seemed to me that my fellow churchgoers were much more righteous than I was. I felt like a weed in a flower garden. But now I can look back and say, "Yes, I did belong in church." I needed to be there. In fact, everyone needs to belong in church.

Church is a hospital for sinners; and we all are sinners, Christians and non-Christians alike. In fact, God made us that way, with an inclination to try everything out, the good and the bad. In the Bible we read a description of our inherent condition: "Because the carnal (natural) mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be."² We naturally oppose the things of God.

We are not sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners.

We think things we shouldn't think, touch things we shouldn't touch, say things we shouldn't say, and do things we shouldn't do. We want our way, and our words, our actions, and our thoughts fall miserably short of God's standard of perfection.

This of course raises a question. Why did God make us imperfect when He commands obedience? Perhaps it is because He wants us to learn through experience that sin brings pain and unhappiness, and eventually get it into our thick heads that our Heavenly Father really does know best. He simply wants us to learn right from wrong. Eventually, just like someone beating his head against a wall, we begin to realise that following our natural inclinations causes headaches. Eventually we come to see that His way truly is the way to peace and happiness.

by
Paul Hailey

When I was young my mother warned me about many things. One day she cautioned me about the electric outlets in our home. She said I could get a shock if I wasn't careful. That made me curious, so I stuck a silver fork in the electric outlet in my bedroom. There was a horrible noise, sparks flew, and my arm vibrated violently. I wasn't hurt, but I very quickly realised that my mother knew more than I did.

Likewise, as we go through life, we learn that our Heavenly Father knows best.

Peter, an unlikely candidate

When Jesus said He didn't come to call the righteous, He was pointing out that we must come to see that we are not righteous of ourselves, and come to admit that we are sinners. Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, was a fisherman who was not known for his refined behaviour and good manners. Quite the opposite. Peter was outspoken, impulsive, and uneducated. Who would want him in church? You would think that our Holy God would have nothing to do with Peter. But Jesus did want Peter! When Peter began to realise that his friend Jesus was actually God, he felt shamefully unworthy even to be in His presence. He fell before Jesus and cried out "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." Jesus' response was not criticism, not even agreement, but encouragement, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men."³ And Peter did go on to be a mighty and effective Apostle of the Lord.

Yes, you and I should not be afraid to come to Him. He knows what we are like. "For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust."⁴ God loves us in spite of our sins. He doesn't condemn repentant sinners. He welcomes us and forgives us once we realise our sinful ways. Even the angels in heaven rejoice when a person has a change of heart and turns to God. Jesus loved Peter. He loves you too.

The Gospel

The really good news is that Jesus has the answer to the sin problem.

He worked it all out 2,000 years ago on a wooden cross in Jerusalem when He allowed Himself to die a criminal's death. It should have been you and me on that cross. Scripture reminds us that "All have sinned; all fall short of God's glorious standard."⁵ The first part of Romans 6:23 brings more bad news, but the last part brings the best news possible: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." We are the guilty ones, who have trampled all over God's perfect law of love. But it wasn't you and me on the cross, it was Him, God Himself, who lived a sinless life and paid that death penalty for us.

He was perfect in righteousness and He counts us righteous when we accept Him as our Lord and Saviour. That's the gospel, the "good news".

When I go to church now I feel right at home. I hear messages that remind me of His mercy in spite of my sin-stained life. He forgives. He really does. I have come to see a loving and understanding God who has our eternal life in mind. He gave us life and He offers us everlasting life. He loves us. That realisation makes me want to worship Him and to try in my own feeble way to please Him.

Yes, it is true that we Christians are imperfect people. We are far from perfect and still sin in word and action. But we have a relationship with God and a personal faith in Jesus Christ. We are saved sinners, destined to live forever in the presence of God.

A remarkable thing happens when we yield to God. He begins to change us from the inside out, reshaping our thoughts and inclinations into something better. We develop a genuine desire to do what is right.

Jesus loves all of humanity. Bruce Marchiano, an actor who portrayed Christ in a movie, put it well when he said, "It doesn't matter who you are, or how many mistakes you've made, or what anyone thinks of you, or what you may think of yourself. It doesn't matter if you doubt it, laugh at it, or if you love it. He loves you." □

¹ Matthew 9:13

² Romans 8:7

³ Luke 5: 8-10

⁴ Psalms 103:14

⁵ Romans 3:23

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