

THE Plain Truth

PP 12578/3/2007

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Jul-Aug 2006

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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Tired of life, with everything to live for

As a member of our local Ministerial Association, I take my turn with a Bible Study at one of the local retirement homes. Folks in these parts tend to live a very long time, and some of the residents are well into their eighties and nineties. And their minds are still sharp.

On one evening last February, a lady who will be 100 next year, asked me, “Why has God let me live this long? What’s the point?”

How do you answer that?

I told her I would need to think about it. A week later I was still thinking.

When we met together again I said, “I don’t have an answer to your question. But let me show you some things in the Bible that I bet you didn’t know were there.”

I asked the group to turn to the Book of Ecclesiastes. It took a few moments to find it. Many of us, even if we have been Christians all our lives, don’t really know our way around the Old Testament.

Unlike the Proverbs, which are aimed at young people, Ecclesiastes seems to be directed at old folks. The author—it was probably King Solomon—looks back on a long and eventful life. He had “been there, done that” and got just about every tee shirt. He contemplates not only his considerable achievements, but also the futility of it all. It makes for a surprising book. I like it in Eugene Peterson’s *The Message* version, which makes the frank, almost cynical observations even more down to earth.

It begins, “Smoke, nothing but smoke... There’s nothing to anything—it’s all smoke”¹, and continues “What’s there to show for a lifetime of work, a lifetime of working your fingers to the bone? One generation goes its way, the next one arrives, but nothing changes—it’s business as usual for old planet earth”².

It continues in this vein through 12 chapters of what seems like glum world-weariness.

“Everything’s boring, utterly boring-

by
John Halford

no one can find any meaning in it... Boring to the eye, boring to the ear. What was will be again, what happened will happen again.”³

“I tried my level best to penetrate the absurdity of life. I wanted to get a handle on anything useful we mortals might do during the years we spend on this earth.”⁴

“But when I looked, I saw nothing but smoke. Smoke and spitting into the wind. There was nothing to any



“But it is how you feel sometimes, isn’t it?” I asked. They agreed.

Whoever wrote this book certainly understood what it was like to get old. These physical frames, in which we spend the first few decades of life, are not meant to last forever:

“In old age, your body no longer serves you so well, Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen... The shades are pulled down on the world. You can’t come and go at will. Things grind to a halt... you’re well on your way to eternal rest, while your friends make plans for your funeral.”⁷

They laughed at that. It was so true.

“Well,” I said. “That’s the best I can do. I haven’t answered the question, but this book shows that it is not wrong for you to ask it. Although the Ancient of Days never experiences senility or the other effects of old age, He has anticipated the kind of things we worry about in the later years. Ecclesiastes is a reminder that you are 100 per cent alive until you are 100 per cent dead. So, “Even if you live a long time, don’t take a single day for granted. Take delight in each light-filled hour, remembering that there will also be many dark days and that most of what comes your way is smoke.”⁸

Eventually it will all become clear. This life, even if it seems to drag on and on, is only the opening notes of a symphony God intends to share with us for eternity. “The last and final word is this: Fear God. Do what he tells you. And that’s it. Eventually God will bring everything that we do out into the open and judge it according to its hidden intent, whether it’s good or evil.”⁹

It seems that the weary old cynic who wrote Ecclesiastes ended up trusting in God’s grace. □

¹ Ecclesiastes 1: 1–2

² Ecclesiastes 1: 3–4

³ Ecclesiastes 1: 8–9

⁴ Ecclesiastes 2:3

⁵ Ecclesiastes 2:11

⁶ Ecclesiastes 8:17

⁷ Ecclesiastes 12: 3–5

⁸ Ecclesiastes 11:8

⁹ Ecclesiastes 12:13

of it. Nothing.”⁵

“Search as hard as you like, you’re not going to make sense of it. No matter how smart you are, you won’t get to the bottom of it.”⁶

As we read these words, everyone murmured in agreement.

“Yep—that is how it is.” “He got that right.” “Yes sir. I feel like that too sometimes.”

“But, what are things like that doing in the Bible?” someone asked. “I always read the Bible for encouragement. This seems so pessimistic.”

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding



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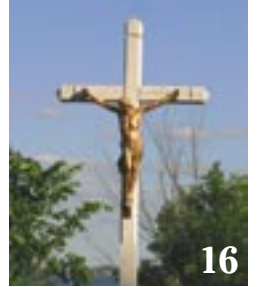
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What our readers say:

It renews and reenergises my faith and walk with Jesus Christ. Thanks and may God continue to bless this ministry.

**Charles Wong,
Kuala Lumpur**

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH helpful because through the magazine God's people can encourage, share, sharpen, uplift and enliven one another. It also helps broaden the mind and spread the word of God. Thanks to THE PLAIN TRUTH for being another vehicle for extending the kingdom till He comes.

**Alex Ng,
Sarawak**

THE PLAIN TRUTH features interesting articles. Articles related to current global events make it more meaningful. The articles on self-improvement are simple and easy to understand.

Vincent Vasudevan

The articles that are enlightening and encouraging have enhanced my faith in our Lord. Thank you Lord Jesus for this wonderful magazine and to all of you wonderful servants of God for making this project a blessing to all.

**Khor Hoe Soon,
Sungei Petani**

It helps us to understand more about God and that God is divine. We are sinners and we suffer because we do not follow God's will.

Joseph Wong

The articles give me hope for my life and my future.

**Wong Yit Fun,
Petaling Jaya**

The articles on current issues sometimes affect me. Some articles offer practical steps to achieve a change in attitude. Notwithstanding, they are not too preachy. Keep up your good works.

**Thomas C. B. Chua,
Alor Setar**



It helps me in my personal growth in the Lord.

**Bobby Teoh Chay Bin,
Klang**

It refreshes my memory of things done unto me by our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Eow Boon Heow,
Bangsar**

It has encouraged me to read God's word daily. I am happy that the good Lord could use this magazine that goes out every quarter to touch and enlighten so many lives for Jesus Christ. Certainly the wonderful articles in your magazine has been valuable to me. Thank you very much for your excellent work, which has built up my faith.

**Anton Joseph,
Subang Jaya**

I have learned so many good things from THE PLAIN TRUTH. My family members and friends have also started reading this magazine and they find it very positive. In fact, I have discovered many things in THE PLAIN TRUTH even though I hardly read the Bible. Thank you so much for the wonderful job which you and your team have done for mankind. I will pray for all your members so that all of you will keep on working on God's project.

**J. F. Jerome,
Kuala Lumpur**

It is informative; it explains and interprets the Bible in modern terms.

**Joseph Dexter,
Subang Jaya**

It provides me with deeper understanding of how the Bible can solve the problems of the present situations which affect our daily lives.

**Hoon Tong Watt,
Kepong Garden**

It broadens my knowledge and I enjoy reading it very much. I've

even lent it to a few friends and they too enjoyed reading it. Thank you. Keep it up. May God bless those people who have written articles and also those who have initiated this magazine.

**Clarence Miwil,
Kota Kinabalu**

It contains a wealth of information and thoughts rooted in the word of God, which is something one needs very much these days to counter the worldly materialism that comes our way.

**Benjamin J. Dawson,
Petaling Jaya**

It reveals the true-to-life stories of some people who suffer and that make me count my blessings everyday. It is a very humbling experience to read about the sufferings of this world.

**Balakrishnan Kaur,
Sungei Petani**

I find it very enriching and I believe others will find it too. It is such a pleasure reading every article in THE PLAIN TRUTH magazine. "It is the truth and nothing but the truth."

**Josephine Mak,
Johor Baru**

It is very thought-provoking, relevant, encouraging, edifying and inspiring.

**Timothy Tan,
Segamat**

It really nourishes me spiritually.

**Lam Chan Meng,
Puchong**

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.

Lesson about damnation

And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons He is driving out demons."

So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables: "...all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin."

He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."¹

"I think I might have committed the unpardonable sin!" The young man's voice on the other end of the phone was frantic. I tried to rub the sleep out of my eyes and sat up in bed. "Why do you say that?" I asked. "I did it again," he moaned. "And after I had repented so deeply. I don't think I'll ever overcome. I think I'm lost. I feel absolutely dreadful."

It wasn't the first time we'd had this conversation. This man's persistent struggle with sin had led him to believe that he was under God's curse. If his repentance had truly been sincere, he reasoned, then he would not ever repeat the sin. Therefore, his repentance must not have been sincere, and since he had repented with all his heart, he decided he must not be capable of true repentance.

Another man approached me after a church service one day. "Dr. Fezell," he whispered. "I don't know what to do. I think I've committed the unpardonable sin."

"Let's talk about that," I said. "What did you do?"

He looked at the ground. "I cursed the Holy Spirit."

"How did you do that?" I asked.

"I said, 'Cursed be the Holy Spirit.'"

"Why?"

"I don't know. I was reading the verse where Jesus said that anyone who blasphemed the Holy Spirit would never be forgiven, and I just felt this crazy compulsion to do it. Now I'm scared to death."

I have heard many strange explanations of the unpardonable sin over the years. I have spoken to many people who fear that they might have committed it. But let us understand something—for



by
Michael Fezell

were from God. Because of their own jealousy, they had rejected the plain witness of the Holy Spirit that Jesus was sent from God and was doing the works of God. They willingly blinded their eyes to God's own testimony through the Spirit that Jesus had come in His name to bind Satan, destroy his evil works and forgive sins.

God sent the Spirit into the world to bear witness to Jesus Christ, the only name under heaven by which humans can be forgiven and saved. To reject that witness, to despise what God has done to bring about

forgiveness of sins, is to reject the forgiveness itself. How can a person be forgiven who refuses to accept forgiveness? How can a person's sins be forgiven if the person rejects the Forgiver of sins?

Are you worried that you might have committed the unpardonable sin? The very fact that you are worried about it is proof positive that you have not committed it. The unpardonable sin is unpardonable only because it is the sin of refusing to come to Jesus to be forgiven. It is the Holy Spirit who leads us to Jesus Christ. The

blasphemy Jesus refers to in this passage is the rejection of the Spirit's witness to Him as the Son of God and Saviour of the world.

So relax. Trust in Jesus, and rest secure in Him. He forgives all sins of every kind, even repeated sins and compulsive sins. And He teaches us through the Holy Spirit, who is His witness, to renounce sin and to live uprightly in Him. Remember this: Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. For those who come to him, no sin is unpardonable. □



those who trust in Jesus, no sin is unpardonable.

When Jesus said, "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin," he was describing a specific attitude and state of mind that by nature is not true and can never be true of those who trust in Him.

Mark explains, "He said this because they were saying, 'He has an evil spirit.'" The teachers of the law had deliberately refused to acknowledge that the works of kindness and mercy that Jesus was displaying among the people

¹ Mark 3:22–30

The Discover

To find God people are willing to go through almost anything. But when God finds us, He makes it so much simpler than we can imagine. For example, would you dip yourself seven times in a muddy river to be cured of a deadly disease? Would you do it if you were instructed by the servant of a man supposedly speaking on God's behalf? Naaman had his doubts.

Be willing and humble to listen

Naaman was the army commander of the nation Aram.¹ His wife had a servant from neighbouring Israel, a young girl who had been taken captive. When this girl came to know that Naaman was suffering from leprosy, an incurable disease, she said to Naaman's wife: "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."²

Naaman conveyed her words to his king. The king of Aram sent him to the king of Israel with a letter, and gifts, asking the king to cure Naaman! The king of Israel was furious with the message. When Elisha came to know about the incident, he instructed the king to direct Naaman to him instead, that he may be cured.³

Naaman then went to see Elisha the prophet. When he was at the door of Elisha's house, Elisha sent him a message through a servant: "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."⁴

But Naaman went away angry and said: "I thought Elisha would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.⁵

By this time Naaman had about enough. He had been slighted by the king of Israel. He had not been accorded the welcome befitting a dignitary he had expected from

by
Ben David

Elisha. Instead, Elisha had sent word through his servant, even though Naaman was at his doorstep! Bathe in the muddy Jordan river seven times? Elisha must be out of his mind, thought Naaman.

Fortunately, there was a twist of events which mirrors what God has done for the new Christians today.

Seven dips to a new heart

"Naaman's servants went to him and said: 'My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, "Wash, and be cleansed"!' So Naaman went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as Elisha had instructed, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy."⁶

Naaman was dramatically healed by God.

Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to see Elisha. Naaman told him: "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant." Elisha refused to accept Naaman's gift. Naaman then pledged to serve only the Lord God who had healed him of his leprosy.⁷

The miracle of God was not confined only to his being cured of a deadly disease. It also showed that Naaman acknowledged the power and working of God in his life. Naaman was not only healed of his physical ailment, he was transformed by the experience of God in his life. The change was total. He was determined to serve the one true God. He had a new heart when he surfaced from the muddy Jordan.

We can learn from Naaman's experience. If we are willing to act on God's Word, we too can experience spiritual transformation in our lives. The change can take root in the way we think, speak and conduct ourselves. It can be inspired by God as His Word takes root in us. But first we need to

acquaint ourselves with His Word, the Bible.

Exercising faith (with works)

Naaman was humble enough to listen to his servant girl who first mooted the idea of seeking Elisha's help. He left his own country to seek out Elisha.

Believing that he had been slighted and treated as a fool, he turned into a rage. But soon after, he was willing to calm down and listen to his servants when they explained to him how simple God's instruction really was.

He saw the hand of God in his life when he obeyed God's instruction. Initially, Naaman did not believe that obeying the word of Elisha would make any difference. When he chose to act on it, however, he saw the incredible change in his physical condition. Acting on God's word helped him to have the new faith and heart to trust God's work in his life. When we study the Bible and apply its teachings, we too can experience substantial and permanent changes, not a 'patchwork' or 'upgrade version.' God healed Naaman by giving him a new body—similar to that of "a young boy." Similarly, God heals us spiritually by giving us a new heart. This new heart transforms us into new creatures. Naaman, when obedient, saw Elisha's word as God's Word.

Trust and obey

God's instruction was simple. It was easy to follow. All Naaman had to do was to stop doubting and start believing. The same principle applies to us today.⁸ We need to trust God's Word and obey what it says. When we act on what we believe, that the Word of God is true, our faith is further strengthened. What God tells us to do is usually what He knows we can do. Whatever we are unable to do, He provides the means and the strength.⁹ If we believe in God's Word, our words and actions will mirror that belief.

Discovery Channel

Naaman had a preconceived idea that Elisha would come out to meet him and perform an elaborate ritual to call upon God to heal him in a display of power. All he got was a servant's instruction to dip in a river—not just any river, but the muddy Jordan! And there was no fanfare to invoke God's healing power. Naaman's recovery depended on the belief that his response to God's instruction would bring about the result he desired.

'cleansed' of our human nature through the Word of God. Through daily Bible study, God can work in us using His Spirit to show us where we need to change. Bible study is an important tool to show us our deepest thoughts, and where they may or may not conform to God's will.¹¹

God calls whom He wills

God chose to heal Naaman who was a 'foreigner' for several reasons. One was to set him apart as an example to show dramatically that the one true God through Elisha was then still at work with His nation, Israel.¹²

In our lives today, God calls us to His salvation according to His pleasure. Some of us may believe that we ourselves on our own effort have sought out the one true God. Naaman's experience shows us that God had used his servant girl, captured earlier from Israel, to lead Naaman to God's spokesperson, Elisha. Obeying

a simple instruction from God revolutionised Naaman's life. Similarly, God decides whom He will call.¹³ When we respond to God's call, and obey His Word, we can experience genuine change. God's Word reveals His will for us, and the way we should walk.

The Discovery Channel unlike any other

Naaman 'discovered' God when he chose to act on a simple instruction. Naaman had a change of heart and was transformed after those seven dips in the waters of Jordan. We can discover God through His Word and become a

new creation through conversion. Our heart and will can conform to the new forms of worship and way of life as described in the Bible.¹⁴ It is the channel God has provided through which we can discover God, and His Son, Jesus.

The Bible is written in such a way that we can study it for a lifetime, and still continue to discover God and His will with a fresh perspective. God's nature is constant. Our discovery of His nature, however, through Bible study and living out His Word and will, is an exciting growth process through which He enjoys guiding us. He not only first loved us and died for us, but He also promises to complete the work He had started in us.¹⁵ We can discover the God we had not known before. This Discovery Channel is unlike any other. It can be internalised. The Word of God can live within us and bear spiritual fruit. As we obey it in faith, our heart and mind, yes, even our will can become one with God's. Now is the time we can discover God in the pages of the Bible.

Study the Bible regularly

Regular personal Bible study—exposing yourself to God's inspired Word—helps us to discover more and more of the God who has called us to walk with Him.¹⁶ It provides spiritual nourishment for our journey. It is the compass which our feet can follow with assurance. We experience genuine spiritual transformation when we walk according to His Word under the leadership of His Holy Spirit.¹⁷ Naaman's miraculous experience is only one testimony recorded in the Bible.

The Bible is God's gift of love and grace. It points to Jesus as the only Person who can make a difference in our lives for now, and forever.¹⁸ The Bible reveals that God is calling us to act.¹⁹ If, and when we do act as Naaman did, God will heal us, reconcile us with Him, and make us a new creation.²⁰ Inspired and regular studying of the Bible can become an adventure of a lifetime. Experience it! □

¹ 2 Kings 5:1–26

² 2 Kings 5:1–3

³ 2 Kings 5:4–8

⁴ 2 Kings 5:9–10

⁵ 2 Kings 5:11–12

⁶ 2 Kings 5:13–14

⁷ 2 Kings 5:15–17

⁸ John 20:27

⁹ 2 Corinthians 12:9

¹⁰ Matthew 11:2–3, 11–19; John 13:6–8

¹¹ Hebrews 4:12

¹² Luke 4:27

¹³ John 6:44

¹⁴ 2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV)

¹⁵ Philippians 1:6

¹⁶ Ephesians 1:17

¹⁷ Romans 8:14

¹⁸ John 6:63

¹⁹ John 5:24, 39

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:17



The Word of God contains simple instructions for us to live by. There are no complicated rituals for us to observe carefully limiting us to time, space and protocol. We can live by the Word in a city of millions, as 'easily' as in a remote jungle surrounded only by chimps.

God's Word teaches us also that God does not always act in the way we think He will or should.¹⁰ We can, however, trust His Word—that He will act according to His will, and provide for us in time of need.

The Word of God cleanses

Just as Naaman was cleansed of his physical leprosy, we can be

Unlocking a key element

To err is human. We all make mistakes. Oftentimes our mistakes cause offences and hurt people's feelings. What should we do when we upset people?

Do we do nothing, hoping the problem will just go away with time? Do we have the tendency to ignore and gloss over our own mistakes to make it seem unimportant?

Do we overlook our own faults and failings, easily forgiving ourselves without ever considering apologising for our offenses? Do we dismiss the issue we have created and pretend the upset caused doesn't bother us—when it really does?

We've all experienced the hurt we've caused others—and then wished we knew how to retrieve the situation. We find, however, that our inability, our reluctance, our failure to apologise, more often than not, actually becomes the very source of a great deal of further upsets and unhappiness in our lives!

Why do we find it so difficult to apologise?

Why is it when we make a mistake, or are just plain wrong, we find it so difficult to say "I'm sorry"? Why is it so difficult to say "Please forgive me"?

We all find that our human nature dislikes admitting we are wrong—or even could be wrong. Our ego resists lowering our pride in apologising, regarding it as a sign of weakness. Even the most opinionated and self-righteous among us are likely to deceive ourselves. We couldn't possibly be wrong! And we've all done that, haven't we? Surprisingly, many of us are blind to our own faults, mistakes, flaws and many other human weaknesses, and we often don't see any need for an apology. Despite knowing we are imperfect and not infallible, the stubbornness in us will not so easily give in to apology without first rationalising or justifying ourselves to be right when we are wrong. Some of us are good at making excuses for not apologising on the pretext that if others don't say sorry to me when they are wrong, why should I?



by
**Yong
Chin Gee**

A lack of concern, consideration and empathy for other people's feelings may be another reason why we hesitate to apologise; some may reason, "What's the use of apologising when what was done can't be undone?"

The fear to apologise

We all have different fears, some of them we've never really thought about. Giving apology to others may be one of them. Asking for pardon, seeking forgiveness from others, can seem humiliating, fearful. We are exposing ourselves to great risk, we make ourselves vulnerable to being ignored or rejected. It can be rather frightening to face uncertainty, of not being pardoned or forgiven, especially when it involves the chance of being sacked from employment, or dismissed from some high official position, or breaking up a partnership, a friendship, our marital relationship, or even being sued, brought to court, fined and jailed.

On the other hand, at times our attorneys would prefer we keep silent rather than apologise to the injured or accusing party. In such cases, we may indeed be unable to apologise, or even acknowledge our guilt.

This is never the case when parents need to acknowledge they have done wrong to their children. It should be easy to say, "I'm sorry, please forgive me dear." It should be easy, but often it's not. We want our children to think that we are incapable of error, or unable to do wrong. When we fail, it is often much easier, more convenient, to ignore our faults or overlook our shortcomings than to apologise to our children.

It is natural that we want to be accepted, respected and loved. Who would not hesitate to apologise when in so doing we lose face, dignity, reputation—all because of our vanities and frailties.

For whatever reasons, many of us find it so difficult to give an

apology to another. But why is the readiness, willingness, to apologise so important to our relationships?

Power of apology

Human relations are rather sensitive, fragile and delicate to handle. In our dealings with our loved ones, friends and colleagues, it is inevitable that hurts and offences will arise. Being human, we make blunders and repeat errors of commission and omission. Under such circumstances, we can be surprised by what an apology can do.

Apologising wisely, in the right mental attitude and manner, has power to heal many emotional wounds, hurts and relational offences. It can stop unnecessary arguments, dissolve anger, soothe shattered pride, settle disputes, resolve emotional conflicts, restore broken bonds and mend fractured relationships. Apology can work wonders when expressed positively, rightly and sincerely. Therefore, apology can do more good than what we could imagine. In fact, the power of an apology is an important key element to maintain good relationship.

Benefits of apology

Interestingly enough, apology benefits the giver and the receiver.

When someone confesses wrong and apologises for causing us hurt, instead of seeing the offender through anger, resentment or even hatred, the wrongdoer's regret, remorse and humility can nonetheless evoke our empathy and compassion to forgive him or her. Apology can help us to move past our anger, resentment and hurts, helping us to heal our emotional wounds. Research shows that when wrongdoers apologise, we find it easier to forgive them. The Bible verifies this truth: "Confess to one another therefore your faults—your slips, your false steps, your offences, your sins, and pray [also] for one another, that you may be healed and restored to a spiritual tone of mind and heart."¹ As our own experience

in human relationships

has shown us so often, when someone confesses that he or she feels sorry for causing us hurt and treasure our relationship, we are more likely to give a positive and friendly response.

On the other hand, our fear or refusal to apologise can create further misunderstanding, animosity and bitterness, hardening the attitude of those we have offended. Besides, holding back an apology can eat

wrongs and mistakes, for losing our temper, for giving them excessive scolding, or punishing them harshly, contrary to what we fear—of being ignored, despised or rejected—they are more likely to forgive us, respect and trust us more, not less. If we do this consistently, we are setting a good example for our children to follow. They will be more willing to apologise and ask us to forgive them when they do wrong,

Necessary and unnecessary apologies

Some of us tend to over apologise. People may misinterpret that we have low self-esteem, lack self worth. Repetitious apology neither helps us rebuild self-esteem, nor does it prevent or deter others from taking advantage of us. It is wise therefore not to offer apologies that will cause us regrets and make things worse.

If, however, we are definitely in the wrong, we certainly need to pluck up courage and say so by apologising quickly.

On the other hand, what if both parties are equally at fault and both are to be blamed?

For example, if we insult a person and he or she responds in kind, does that mean that both are even, that no apologies are needed on either side, and no one should seek an apology from the other? The Bible tells us that what we should do is to take responsibility for our part and to initiate an apology even if the other person does not reciprocate.² A good genuine apology, one from the heart, opens the way to restore hurt or soured relationships, and reaffirms the dignity, respect and inherent worth of both parties. By so doing we are following the teaching of Scriptures, “Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.”³

What if we are being rebuked harshly for our apology to the offended party? Then we need to take a step back and keep quiet. After all, we have said all we can, and to remain silent is wise under such circumstances. The Bible says, “For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.”⁴

How to apologise?

We can understand how children sometimes offer superficial apologies

away at us, adversely affecting our physical, emotional and spiritual health. We know when we are in the wrong, and our bad conscience so often convicts us, even when outwardly nothing seems wrong. By apologising we take the responsibility for our faults and offences, thus enabling us to deal with self reproach, overcome any inward shame and clear up our guilty conscience. It also helps to bridge the gap of our strained or broken relationship with the one we have offended.

Then again, as parents, if we are humble enough to apologise to our children by admitting our

without feeling embarrassed or shameful; they will understand that it takes courage and strength of character to apologise when at fault. We parents should not take the relationship with our children for granted but be ever vigilant and cautious in how we deal with them. We should try not to hurt or offend them unnecessarily in what we say, in our actions and behaviour, and if we do, we need to have the courage to apologise. So often this later brings untold benefits to the giver and receiver.



like mumbling “I’m sorry” if demanded by parents as an order, not for something they feel wrong or truly sorry about. However, apologising superficially won’t do much good in many serious situations where people are deeply hurt or offended. If we are genuinely sorry, it should be heartfelt, having a true sense of regret or remorse. We have to be humble enough to take responsibility and explain where we have made the mistakes and gone wrong in our words, actions or behaviour in upsetting them. We need to reassure the offended party that we will try not to repeat our mistakes and will mend our ways. In certain situations we may even have to make restitution or give compensation for the serious injury we have caused to the victim of our wrongdoings. Our genuine, sincere apology will have a greater chance of being accepted and we be forgiven. Transforming or healing a rift in friendship and other relationships certainly demands a good, authentic and effective apology.

Why apology is most important in life?

The ultimate purpose of apology is to restore friendly or love relationship between two parties, the offender and the offended. Scriptures have terms such as confession, repentance, atonement, redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation and salvation.

The saying, “To err is human, and to forgive is divine,” aptly describes our state of sinfulness as none of us is truly good or righteous; however, it is God’s divine grace to forgive us when we deeply apologise for our offences towards God and truly repent of our sins before Him. Apostle John verified this reality when he wrote, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He (God) is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word has no place in our lives.”⁵

Christ emphatically preached the gospel of repentance and forgiveness in His ministry on earth. For example, when the self-righteous religious leaders questioned Jesus Christ why He ate with tax collectors and sinners, and in reply He said, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come



- ¹ James 5:16 (Amplified Bible)
- ² Mathew 5:23–24, 38–39
- ³ 1 Peter 3:11
- ⁴ 1 Peter 2:19–20
- ⁵ 1 John 1:8–10
- ⁶ Luke 5:30–32
- ⁷ Luke 24:45–48
- ⁸ Luke 13:1–3
- ⁹ John 3:16
- ¹⁰ 2 Peter 3:9
- ¹¹ 1 Timothy 2:4–6

to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”⁶

On another occasion, after Christ’s resurrection, before His ascension to heaven, He told the disciples that repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, and they were to be the witnesses of His life, death and resurrection.⁷

On the other hand, Jesus also warned people of the danger of impenitence i.e., sinners who are unrepentant and wilfully reject Him and His gospel of salvation. They will inevitably face the fearful judgment of eternal death and separation from the almighty God. When told some Galileans were cruelly killed by Pontius Pilate, Christ said, “Do you think that those Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will likewise perish.”⁸

God is a merciful and loving God. He sacrificed His Son Jesus Christ to die for our sins so that we can inherit eternal life.⁹ Apostle Peter said, “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”¹⁰

The Bible reaffirms that “God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of His life, for there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.”¹¹

Therefore, in the light of the gospel of Christ, to apologise or not to apologise for hurting, offending and sinning against God is the most important decision to make in life. God says He’d rather we choose life, but the decision is yours. The choice is now yours for you to decide. □

My daughter's wavering faith

My 17-year-old daughter has continually surprised me from the moment she was two minutes old—when the attending medical team commented on her unusual mental sharpness.

I say this not just for bragging rights, but to provide a backdrop for what she has always done—pondered mature philosophical ideas. I should have expected it, then, when I suggested she pray about her prospective college scholarship awards, and she said to me: “You know Mom, I’m not sure there is a God.”

As a clinical therapist, I’ve been trained to develop a therapeutic visual facade—known as game face in sports circles. Upon hearing her declaration of considering atheism, I went instinctively into a calm, emotion-free, therapy face. But on the other side of my game face was panic face—aaaagggghhhh! How could my daughter question God’s existence? OK, breathe... breathe... relax! Stay calm... breathe!

After stabilising my oxygen intake, I managed to morph back into normal mode, the calm and understanding Mom who has so often helped her child walk through life’s difficult issues.

“So dear, how did you come to that thought?” Alexis proceeded to paint a picture of inconsistencies between what she had been taught and believed God was supposed to be like, and that He actually did not seem to be measuring up historically, globally and personally. As usual she cogently blended aged logic with 17-year-old experience.

Being the dutiful, though slightly panicky Mom, I thought it best to ask her general questions about her previously held proofs of God’s existence as well as provide her with what I believed to be some helpful direction.

I proposed to her that faith is

always a personal experience, and one human cannot establish belief for another. I told her she would have to discover her own experience of God, and that if she was willing to prove He does exist, then He would surely provide her a unique assurance of His existence.

She quickly reminded me that my reasoning was flawed because any scientist worth her research knows that you cannot prove that something exists; you prove what does not exist based on the absence of certain traits in your subject matter. What?



Knowing my child’s personality, I have learned it is best to challenge her thinking, or debate with her, only if she initiates the dialogue. Since she was not asking me for proof or assurance, I told her that I appreciated the fact she was willing to share such a huge personal struggle with me. I assured her that if she decided to discuss more about spiritual paths I would gladly do that with her.

That conversation stayed with me for the next several days, and I added her need for clarity to my prayer list. I realised first of all that praying about it would be the most powerful action I could take.

Next, I realised that the things I said to her—even in game face—were wholly correct. She needed to know that she could ponder the most monumental concept of humanity and that she could rely

by
Dr. Rose Huff

on me to support her.

I don’t have to agree with her or like it, but she would not benefit from the pressure of an upset parent.

She, like most of us, needs the freedom to not believe in order to make the journey towards believing. It’s the age-old parenting technique used with your toddler who has learned to say no.

You provide options instead of choosing for them. We learn to ask the small child who refuses to wear a shirt, “Do you want to wear the green shirt or the blue shirt?” This has always worked well between Alexis and me.

The other part of my realisation was that, once again, my own faith is being challenged. I need to trust that God holds my daughter as lovingly in His hands as I have always experienced Him in directing my own life’s journey. After all, He blessed me by allowing me to give birth to her and rear her, but ultimately she belongs to Him. It is His desire that none should be lost, but each person’s journey is a unique path towards Him.

As a parent I always wanted two things that were actually mutually exclusive:

- 1) the BEST for my children; and
- 2) to shield them from any pain or hurt.

Unfortunately, if a person ever made it from birth to age 18 with factor number two ruling the day, he or she would not be equipped to manage mature, productive adult life.

So while on one hand I would love for Alexis to have already arrived at that amazing place of believing with certainty that God exists, I know that merely accepting that without the process of struggling through her doubts would rob her of the rich experience and lessons that will some day make Him a reality to her.

On the other hand, I also know God’s love for Alexis, and I can rest in faith that at the right time He will make Himself irrefutably known to her. □

Evolution: F

How good is the evidence that life evolved naturally, without a Creator?

The first verse of the Bible tells us, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” It does not tell us precisely how He did it.

It is “by *faith* we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”¹

God out of the picture

Many of us are quite happy to leave it there—a matter of faith. But others seek a scientific explanation for the origin of the universe and the subsequent development of millions of life forms. There is nothing necessarily wrong with this. Scientific discovery and biblical revelation do not have to be in conflict. Unless, that is, science leaves God out of the picture.

Unfortunately, the commonly accepted scientific explanation for the origin and development of life—the theory of evolution—does leave God out. The theory proposes that life was generated originally from



by
John Halford

nonliving material, and evolved gradually over billions of years by natural processes.

Although evolutionists admit they don’t yet adequately understand how this happened, *that* it happened is not negotiable. For them, evolution is one of the “facts” of scientific life. But should it be?

Certainly, you need faith to believe there is a Creator God. But if you believe that there is no God, you also need faith to believe *that*.

Was Darwin right?

Although the details have changed, the theory of evolution is still essentially based on the concepts of Charles Darwin (1809–1882). He was not the first to suggest that life gradually developed in complexity through evolution, but he did advance a scientific theory to explain how evolution might have worked.

Darwin’s ideas have helped shape scientific thinking for more than 100 years. His original concepts have been reshaped, as Darwin did not fully grasp the role

of genetics. The theory as generally taught today in the classroom is known as Neo-Darwinism. In essence, Neo-Darwinism is based on two premises. First, that living organisms are subject to random variations through mutation. Second, some variations give their recipients an advantage, so that through natural selection (what came to be known as “survival of the fittest”), new species develop.

Some scientists have pointed out that the second of these premises, that better-adapted life forms are more likely to survive, is a circular argument. Obviously, if only the fittest survive, those that survive are the fittest. This neither proves nor disproves evolution. But what about the first premise? Can new species develop through random mutation?

Micro and macro

Certain characteristics of living plants and animals change—that cannot be disputed. Animal breeders have long known how to exploit variation through artificial selection. Similar variations also occur in nature. The potential for variation in animals and plants is known as microevolution, and it explains why we have such variety of life on earth. Not just generic dogs, cats and horses, but hundreds of different breeds.

The theory of evolution suggests that this potential for variation *within* species eventually allows one life form to gradually evolve into another, into an entirely different species, genus, or family—a process known as macroevolution.

If evolution is to work, that is what must happen. But—and this is crucial to understanding why some scientists see a problem with the theory—it has never been demonstrated that macroevolution actually happens! In fact, the evidence seems to point to a different conclusion.

If it cannot be shown that macroevolution occurs, a



Fact or faith?

fundamental premise of evolution is on shaky scientific ground, and to accept this theory one needs—let's call it what it is—faith. A paleontologist or evolutionary biologist might not like that word because of its religious connotations. But since one definition of faith in *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* is "firm belief in something for which there is no proof," then faith it is.

But faith is not subject to scientific investigation, and this is why the theory of evolution is being challenged. Not just by creationists, but by scientists from many branches of science who are committed to scientific integrity. These scientists believe that because this fundamental premise of evolution has not been confirmed, the present conclusions do not adequately explain the origin of new species when examined by science's own rules.

Still missing links

Charles Darwin recognised some potential flaws in his theory. In particular, he knew that if evolution progressed slowly across the ages, as he had suggested, we should expect to find evidence of transitional life forms ("missing links") in the fossil record. The fact that no such fossils had been found was, Darwin said, "the greatest objection which can be urged against my theory."

Darwin wrote these words in the early days of paleontology, when only a few fossils had been classified. He was confident that further discoveries would validate his ideas. But they have not. Today, about 200 million fossils have been found and classified into about a quarter of a million species. But in this vast horde, there are still no adequate fossils that can be considered beyond all doubt transitional forms, and only a few that are candidates for intermediate forms.

"The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil



record persists as the trade secret of paleontology," writes Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould in the May 1977 issue of *Natural History* (page 14).

A scientific theory must be based on an objective analysis of the facts. But so far, the evidence fails to confirm evolution. It points to a different explanation. Rather than show that life gradually develops from simple to complex, the fossil record seems to indicate that life forms appear abruptly, then they exist with only minor variations for millions of years, and sometimes abruptly become extinct.

Recognising this, some evolutionists have proposed a variation of the Darwinian model of gradual evolution. Called "Punctuated Equilibria," it suggests that since the fossils show that species remain stable for long periods, then macroevolution must occur suddenly (suddenly, that is, on a geological time scale, meaning it happened in millions rather than hundreds of millions of years). This gets around the problem of missing transitional

forms, but it does not resolve the main problem: There seems to be a "species barrier" beyond which variations do not happen.

Pig's wings and cylindrical eggs

Today, scientists have confirmed this in ways that Darwin could never have imagined. We now understand that mutations happen at the level of genes and chromosomes. But even when examined at the molecular level, genetic types show resistance to change beyond a certain limit.

Ecologist Ed Deevey wrote in *The Yale Review*: "Some remarkable things have been done by crossbreeding and selection inside the species barrier, or within the larger circle of closely related species, such as wheat. But wheat is still wheat, and not, for instance, grapefruit; and we can no more grow wings on pigs than hens can make cylindrical eggs" (pages 631–640).

House of cards

Think of this built-in potential for variation within a species as a pack of cards. You can shuffle them, and get many variations of the original

hand. But no amount of shuffling will produce new cards.

Colourful charts of the development of life and reconstructed fossil progressions can be rather intimidating to someone who believes in creation, or in any theory suggesting abrupt appearance. The evidence for evolution when presented this way seems overwhelming. But such displays rarely focus on the weaknesses in the underlying theory.

But if one can't prove how species evolve, a skilful museum display or artist's impression doesn't mean much. It's like preparing for a trip by buying a guidebook and route maps, then discovering your car doesn't have an engine!

Scientists who criticise evolution are not necessarily espousing the creationist's cause. Many simply want their colleagues in paleontology and evolutionary biology to be accurate and objective.

They recognise that without confirmable data, evolution does not warrant the distinction of being considered an authoritative theory. If speculation based on such an unproven premise was advanced in any other branch of science, it would be considered a highly conjectural hypothesis, not an idea on which to build a major branch of knowledge. Other views of the origin and development of life deserve to be heard.

Messy and personal

But evolutionists are as human as the rest of us, and it is difficult for them to admit the role faith plays in their thinking. Notice what Stephen Jay Gould wrote about what he called the "messy and personal side of science": "Our ways of learning about the world are strongly influenced by the social preconceptions and biased modes of thinking that each scientist must apply to any problem. The stereotype of a fully rational and objective 'scientific method,' with individual scientists as logical (and interchangeable robots) is self-serving mythology" (*Natural History*, February 1994, page 14).

Unfortunately, many evolutionists seem to be trapped in circular reasoning: Evolution must be true; therefore, there must be a mechanism that produces evolution. And the best candidate is still natural selection from random mutation. But until this can be demonstrated to occur naturally,

at a macroevolutionary level, it should remain conjecture. And conclusions based on it have to be accepted in faith, whether or not evolutionists will admit it.

The Wonders of Creation

An evolutionist once noted that "if indeed the Creator exists, He seems to be inordinately fond of beetles," because He made so many of them. Our

Creator is fond of beetles, and everything else He has made. He said it was all "very good."²

God's creation is living proof of His absolute mastery of life. He created life and sustains it, whether on a windswept mountain, a parched desert or in the deepest ocean abyss. He can make

it beautiful or bizarre, robust or fragile, "larger than life" or microscopically tiny. But always perfect, intricate and functional. Through the

wonders of creation, God has shown us

He loves life.

God also loves you and wants you to have life.

Not just for a few short years, but life that lasts forever. God wants you to have this life so much that "He gave His one and only Son, that whoever

believes in Him shall not perish

but have eternal life."³

We, the created, have never been able to make life. Not even a lowly beetle. But, because of our Creator's love we are given life that will last forever.

Humbling, isn't it?

A case for humility

This should reassure those of us who believe in a divine Creator. It certainly makes no less sense to believe in a Creator than it does to believe in evolution. But

a note of caution: The failure of evolution to prove its case does not automatically establish God as Creator to the sceptic and agnostic. And although the evidence strongly suggests the abrupt appearance of life, this does not *scientifically* establish that such life was divinely created. Some creationists, with a fundamentalist approach to the Bible, oversimplify the question. Einstein once said, "Make things as simple as possible, but not more simple than they are."

If, as Stephen Jay Gould says, science has its messy and personal side, so do some views of the Bible. Some biblical reconstructions of creation use scriptures and circular reasoning to support preconceived ideas. Preconceived stereotypes are not the path to understanding. Evolutionists have not been able to satisfactorily explain the origin and development of life, but their search has uncovered information that leads to challenging and exciting questions.

Additionally, there are many points of view among those who believe in God as Creator. Scientists with a deep respect for the Bible (and there are many) recognise that a wealth of information is waiting to be discovered and interpreted. The search for origins should be an arena where science and faith meet with mutual respect and tolerance. "There is bogus or pseudo-science just as much as there is bogus or pseudo-religion, and the only worthwhile battle is between genuine and bogus, not between science and religion" (Ken Wilber, *Quantum Questions*, New Science Library, 1984, page 21). □

Further reading:

The books listed below are from a growing body of literature that questions the validity of evolution from a scientific viewpoint.

Bird, W. R. & Nelson, T. (1991) *The Origin of Species Revisited*, Vol. 1. Regency.

Milton, R. (1992) *The Facts of Life*, Fourth Estate.

Denton, M. & Burnett, A. (1986) *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis*.

Johnson, P. E. (1991) *Darwin on Trial*, InterVarsity Press.

Hayward, A. (1995), *Creation and Evolution*, Bethany.

¹ Hebrew 11:3

² Genesis 1:31

³ John 3:16

Acceptance—What price is too high?

Everybody wants to fit in. *Everybody.* Everybody wants to be accepted, liked, loved, appreciated.

That's probably not news to you. High school can be a miserable place if you feel like you don't belong. People can think you are "different" because of the way you look, dress, behave, because of what you eat or because of your grades or where you live.

If you've been labelled in a negative way, you're probably doing everything you can think of to change it.

But, like any need, the craving for acceptance can get out of control. Unless you understand and control it, it can lead you around by the nose and cause you to do things you don't want to do.

Fitting in isn't a problem by itself. But what if the people you want to fit in with will only accept you if you wear expensive clothes, and you can't afford them? Or what if the "in" crowd is involved in immoral or illegal activities?

The problem comes when we want to be accepted by the wrong people, or for the wrong reasons. Or we allow our need for acceptance to lead us into behaving in ways that are harmful.

Are you afraid to be different in those cases where you have to be?

This need for acceptance can go to great lengths to satisfy itself. It can control you. That's why you have to remain in control. Don't let your peers decide who you will be. Don't sell your personality to pay the dues for some exclusive clique.

If you're not careful, this need

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can undermine the morals that anchor you and replace them with empty values that will make your life hollow and purposeless.

But there's a simple solution. Simple to understand, that is. It isn't always simple to put into practice.

There's one place you can always find acceptance, where you'll always be understood and appreciated. And that's with God.

Sound religious and simplistic?

Maybe it does. But it is practical, and it's the only place where it really matters if you're accepted. God says in Hebrews 13:5: He'll

you to compromise yourself to fit in. They'll want you to take drugs. They'll expect you to be sexually active.

In some cases, they'll want you to vandalise or cheat. In some cliques—such as some street gangs—fitting in means murdering.

If you want to be accepted by these groups, you'll have to conform to their requirements for membership. If you don't follow their rules, you'll be an outcast. Fair enough. Are you going to let your fear of being different control you?

It's not always wrong to conform, of course. Your part is to conform to

the right things. Fit in with a group that is responsible. Find a group of friends that doesn't require you to go against your personal ethics. It may not be easy, but these friends can be found.

Choosing your friends carefully is one of the wisest things you'll ever do. Why? Because "he who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm."³

The Bible says, "For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small

is the gate and narrow is the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."⁴

Those few have to have the courage to do what's right, even if it's not popular. You can be one of them.

Remember, though, that nobody likes someone who's smug about being right. Being Holier-Than-Thou is not standing up for what's right—it's being a jerk. There's a difference.

When you want to fit in, make sure it is with the right people, for the right reasons. Stay in control of your need for acceptance. Who you are and who you will be depend on it. □



¹ Romans 8:31

² Psalms 118:6

³ Proverbs 13:20

⁴ Mathew 7:13–14

never leave you or give up on you. He's always there to help. He always understands. You can't always count on people that way.

Don't worry about enemies. If God is for us, as the Bible says, who can be against us?¹ The only one we need to fear is God.² We don't have to be afraid of being different if God is on our side—rather, if we're on God's side.

There's another important way of getting control of your need for acceptance. That is to fit in with the right group.

Some cliques at school will want

When heaven

Hell, earth or heaven—where do you want to be if given a choice? By all accounts, hell is not a nice place because it is associated with torture, pain, wailing and weeping. So let's avoid going there!

Earth is certainly a much better place than hell. There are many beautiful and interesting places to visit as well as diverse communities, cultures and traditions to enjoy and experience. But if we happen to live in countries like Haiti, Niger,

permanently here on earth? The response probably is both yes and no. Yes, because we haven't found a better place than earth yet. No, because sooner or later we all will die. That's the stark reality of life whether we like it or not.

So where does that leave us? Heaven of course! Heaven is associated with abundant life—very long life, vibrant health, great abilities, fun, love, joy, peace, community, and much more. I am sure that's where we all want to be.



**by
Dr. P.
Sellappan**

God came

When God created Adam and Eve, He was with them. Heaven (God) met earth (man). Our first parents communicated with God freely and He gave them the essential knowledge—the knowledge of salvation. He was *near* to them, but not *in* them. He wanted them to build an intimate relationship with Him. So He gave them the Tree of Life, which symbolised eternal life through the Holy Spirit, the third Person in the Godhead. He



Iraq or Afghanistan, life can be pretty hellish because of grinding poverty and frequent bombings. Even in beautiful and prosperous Malaysia and Singapore life can be pretty unbearable if we are sick with AIDS, cancer, diabetes or stroke. Not to mention the dreaded *rigor mortis* that takes away our lives without mercy irrespective of our station in life. So do we want to live

But how do we get there? Heaven seems so distant, mysterious and elusive. Until now, no one has actually gone to heaven and returned to tell us what it is really like except one Person—Jesus Christ. So let's listen carefully to what He has to say because the stakes are really high—whether we will be in heaven or not.

told them that they could freely eat its fruit. If they had eaten, they would have received the Holy Spirit and it would dwell *in* them. Yes, God would have dwelt *in* them—teaching, guiding and empowering them to live godly lives. Man *could* have become one with God. That's the kind of intimacy He intended for them (and for us today). But they (and we) had to make the

meets earth

choice. He wouldn't force that upon them (or us).

God departed

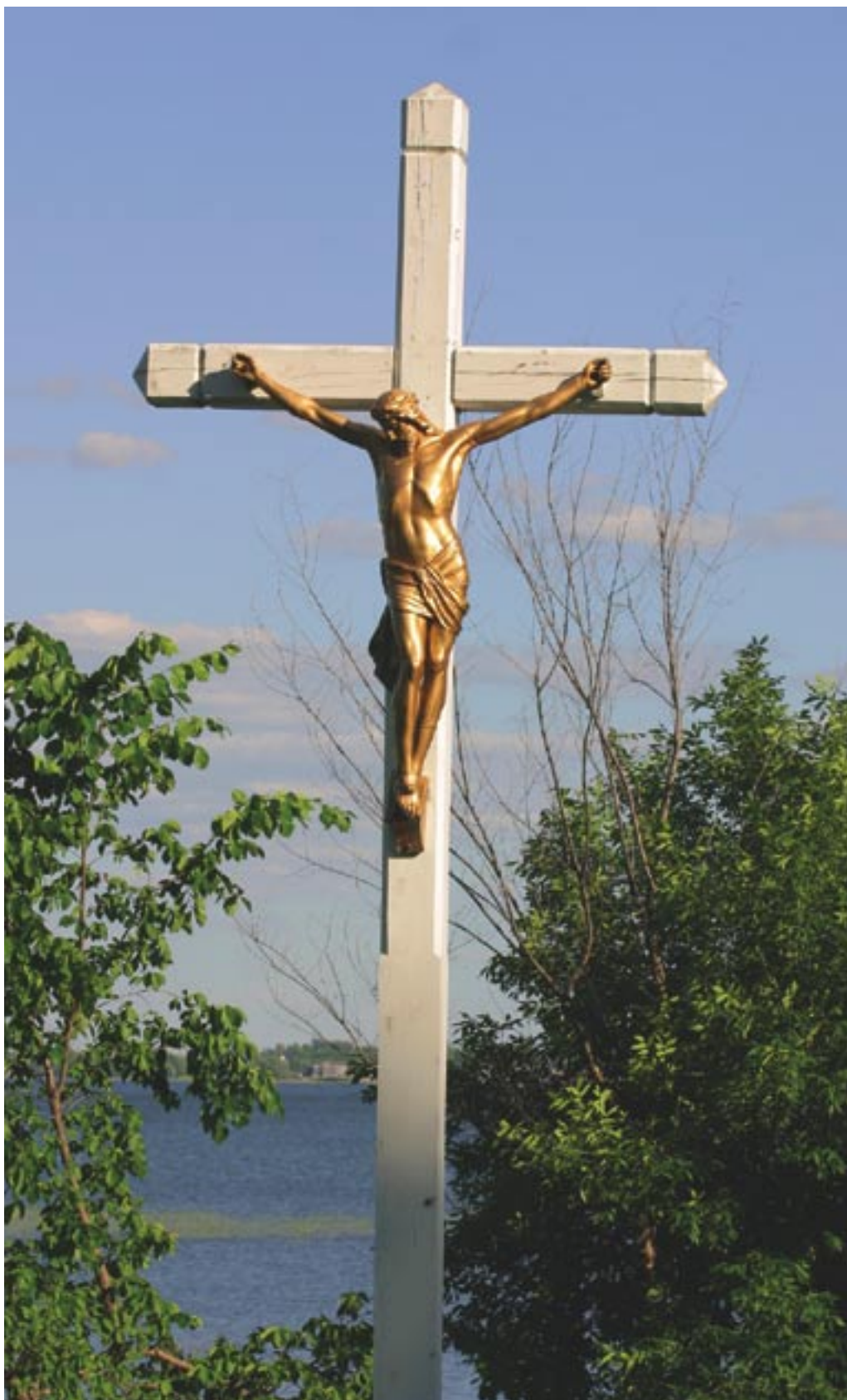
God came so near to our first parents, but they didn't grab hold of Him unlike Jacob.¹ Instead, tempted by Satan, they took the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil which God warned them not to eat. This tree symbolised disobedience, sin and eternal death. Thus sin entered the world causing heaven to depart from earth. God is holy and He wouldn't dwell with sinning humanity. Sin severed Man's connection with God.² Man threw his moral and spiritual compass away and ever since humanity had been groping in darkness—searching for the elixir of life—the heavenly life—that only God could give. No wonder heaven appears so distant, mysterious and elusive to humanity!

Sin brought an unbridgeable gulf between God and Man.

God is holy and eternal while Man is sinful and mortal. Something had to be done to bridge that vast gulf between God and Man. Nothing—no amount of good works and charitable acts, no amount of penance, no amount of rituals, no amount of prayer—can atone for our sin and bridge this gulf. There is one and only one solution—Jesus Christ's sacrifice.³

God and man reconnected

God loves us so immensely that He made it possible for us to be reconciled and reconnected to Him. He did this by paying the penalty for our sin which is eternal death.⁴ He paid our death penalty by letting His Son Jesus die for us. Jesus shed His blood to pay for our sin so that, when we accept Him as our personal Saviour, God forgives us and removes the death sentence.⁵ His blood cleanses our sin and so we are declared not guilty. More than that, God the Holy Spirit comes to dwell *in* us and imparts to us His divine



nature⁶ and puts us in right standing with God and thus the connection which was broken because of sin is now re-established. We can now freely commune with God. Indeed, He invites us to come to His throne of *grace*⁷ and share our life's concerns with Him. He wants each of us to build a personal, intimate and eternally lasting relationship with Him.

Fully God and fully Man

Jesus' birth was unique. The Holy Spirit came upon Mary, a virgin, and she conceived and gave birth to Jesus.⁸ Jesus was both God and Man—God because he was born of the Holy Spirit and Man because he was born of Mary. So He was *fully God* and *fully Man*. In Him, heaven (divinity) and earth (humanity) became one. This is one of the most profound events in the history of the universe. It was necessary for Him to be both God and Man because only as God He could forgive our sin and make us holy and raise us to eternal life, and only as Man He could die for us because we all have sinned and earned the death penalty. As God, He exercised His divine power (such as walking on water, calming the storm, casting out demons, healing sicknesses and raising people from the dead) so that people would believe Him. At all other times, He lived just like any of us except that He never sinned. Like us, He got hungry, He got tired, and He endured pain, rejection, shame, and disappointment. Why? So that He could be our compassionate and merciful High Priest who can empathise with us and understand all our human failings and weaknesses. This God-Man nature qualified Jesus as our Mediator between God and us. After all, He had been in both heaven and earth.

At one with God

Just hours before His death on the cross, Jesus prayed to His Father that His followers might be at one with Him: "I pray for them...that they may be *one* as we are *one*."⁹ He continued: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. *May they also be in us...* I have given them the glory that you gave me, *that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me...* Father, *I want those you have*

given me to be with me where I am [heaven]... I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and *that I myself may be in them.*"¹⁰

The Message reverberates

God echoed the same message through His prophets hundreds of years before the first coming of Jesus Christ. For example, "I will put my dwelling place among you... I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people,"¹¹ and "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant... My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people... *my sanctuary is among them forever.*"¹²

God also echoed it again through His apostles after Christ's death and resurrection as in the following scriptures: "...For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory,*"¹³ and "How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called *children of God!* And that is what we are!... Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be *like Him*, for we shall *see Him* as He is."¹⁴

Empowered by the Holy Spirit

After Christ's resurrection, on the Day of Pentecost A.D. 31, God sent the Holy Spirit to dwell *in* believers (i.e., those who confessed their sin and accepted Christ as their personal Saviour). The Holy Spirit came and dwelt in them in a miraculous way. The Spirit gave believers a new mind—a spiritual dimension—and imbued them with power to go and spread the gospel. It was given as a down payment—to *begin* the Man-God relationship. It opened the way for believers to develop a personal relationship with God that would grow and grow. The process that started 2,000 years ago continues and will continue until the second coming of Christ.

Become One with God

When Christ comes the second time round, He will resurrect

His saints (believers) and change their bodies to immortal, glorified bodies. Our relationship with God will then have been consummated—we will have become one with God and will live with Him in that glorified (heavenly) state for evermore. Man will finally be united with God in the new heaven and new earth. Talking about this hope, the apostle John writes, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the *dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them.* They will be His people, and *God Himself will be with them* and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."¹⁵

We have a choice

Given the choice, where do we want to be—hell, earth or heaven? The choice seems crystal clear. God paid an enormous price to redeem us. He sent His son Jesus to become one of us so that we might enter heaven. If we understand why He came to the earth and believe and accept Him as our personal Saviour, heaven will not be mysterious or elusive anymore. Heaven had already come before in the Person of Jesus even though many did not recognise Him. After Jesus completed His earthly mission, He died and was buried, but He rose from His grave as a *glorified Man*. In this state, He manifested Himself to many, and showed how we too can put on our heavenly mantel and dwell with Him in this glorified state forever.¹⁶ In this glorified state, He operated in a higher dimension—He could walk through walls, appear and disappear at will, and navigate distant galaxies faster than light.

You don't have to figure out how to get to heaven. Heaven has come to us, and will come to you the moment you believe and welcome Jesus into your heart. □

¹ Genesis 32: 24–31

² Isaiah 59:2

³ Acts 4:12

⁴ Romans 6:23

⁵ Romans 3:25

⁶ 2 Peter 1:3–4

⁷ Hebrews 4:16

⁸ Matthew 1:23

⁹ John 17:9–11

¹⁰ John 17:20–26

¹¹ Leviticus 26: 11–12

¹² Ezekiel 37: 26–28

¹³ Colossians 3: 1–4

¹⁴ 1 John 3:1–2

¹⁵ Revelation 21: 1–4

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:45–49

We will either be a nation under God or God will let us go under.
Clayton Doss

People who fly into a rage always make a crash landing.
Will Rogers

You can't fail to get along with a computer; it will never turn on you, it will never insist on talking about what it wants to talk about or doing what it wants to do. It will never find you boring, never forget to call, never ask a favour.
Greg Easterbrook

Kindness is the inability to remain at ease in the presence of another person who is ill at ease, the inability to remain comfortable in the presence of another who is uncomfortable, the inability to have peace of mind when one's neighbour is troubled.
Rabbi Samuel H. Holdenson

There are seven deadly sins in the world—Wealth without Works, Pleasure without Conscience, Knowledge without Character, Commerce without Morality, Science without Humanity, Worship without Sacrifice, and Politics without Principle.
Mahatma Gandhi

It seems rather incongruous that in a society of super sophisticated communication, we often suffer from a shortage of listeners.
Erma Bombeck
U.S. humorist

Man's mind stretched by a new idea never goes back to its original dimensions.

Oliver Wendell Holmes
U.S. physician & author

The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want, and, if they can't find them, make them.

George Bernard Shaw
Irish playwright

The straight and narrow path would be wider if more people used it.

Kay Ingram
U.S. writer

I want to know why, if men rule the world, they don't stop wearing neckties.

Linda Ellerbee
U.S. broadcast journalist

Real joy comes not from ease or riches or from the praise of others, but from doing something worthwhile.

Sir Wilfred Grenfell
English medical missionary

In spite of illness, in spite even of the sorrow caused by the arch-enemy, one can remain alive long past the usual date of disintegration if one is unafraid of change, insatiable in intellectual curiosity, interested in big things, and happy in small ways.

Edith Wharton
American novelist

Those who bring sunshine to the lives of others cannot keep it from themselves.

Sir James Barrie
Scottish playwright

You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, "I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along." You must do the thing you think you cannot do.

Eleanor Roosevelt
American lecturer, writer, and wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt

My philosophy is that not only are you responsible for your life, but doing the best at this moment puts you in the best place for the next moment.

Oprah Winfrey

Those who cannot forgive others break the bridge over which they themselves must pass.

Confucius

Pain makes you think. Thought makes you wise. Wisdom makes life endurable.

John Patrick
American playwright

In my youth I stressed the importance of freedom, and in my old age I stress the need for order.

I have made the great discovery that liberty is a product of order.

Will Durant
American historian

Anonymous Sayings:

Wisdom is in the head, not in the beard.

The best way to face trouble is to face it.

A diamond is just a piece of coal that made good under pressure.

A friend is somebody you can be quiet with.

A smile goes a long way but you have to start it on its journey.

God gives every bird its food, but He does not throw it in the nest.

The ladder of success may now be an elevator, but it's still self-service.

A good listener is a silent flatterer.

Sight is a faculty; seeing is an art.

Freedom is the right to be wrong, not the right to do wrong.

Before you decide on your aim in life, check your ammunition.

The wisdom of life is to endure what we must and to change what we can.

Love lives in cottages as well as in castles.

In golf as in life it's the follow-through that makes the difference.

On a tombstone in Chattanooga: "I came into this world without my consent and left in the same manner."

Every minute starts an hour and every minute is a new opportunity.

Each time the clock ticks you have a chance to start over; to say, do, think, or feel something in such a way that you and the world are better for it.

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.

Does God m

God does not change.¹ Indeed His Hebrew name *Yahweh* indicates that He is The One Who Is, or the Eternal One.² But if God remains the same, how can His laws change? Can the Eternal give temporary laws?

It is obvious throughout Scripture that God does in fact give commands to some people but not to others. Commands He gave to Noah do

future followers. Similarly, when Jesus commanded His disciples to go only to the cities of Israel,⁵ He was not creating an eternal law.

Even though God remains the same and His purpose remains the same, He sometimes gives commands that are suited to a particular person and circumstance. When we read a command God gave Abraham,

by
Michael Morrison

Animal sacrifices

Most Christians know that God commanded His people in the Old Testament to make animal sacrifices. Every day, they had rituals to perform, animals to kill and burn on the altar. There were various washings, grain offerings, wine offerings, and other offerings. Most Christians also know (by observation, if nothing else) that



not apply to others. When He told Abraham to sacrifice his son,³ He did not intend for anyone else to go and do likewise. When He commanded Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, He did not intend for anyone else to do it.

When He told Joshua to go around an enemy city seven days in a row,⁴ He was not creating a law for all

we do not have to assume that we must also obey it. When we read a command given to the Jews, we do not assume that we must do it, too. Some of the commands He gave through Moses are still valid for us today; others are not, and we want to know how to discern the difference.

Christianity does not involve any animal offerings. What God once commanded, He no longer requires.

We can see this explained in the book of Hebrews, chapter 10. The law was only a shadow, verse 1 says, not the reality of salvation. We could compare it to a sketch or a simple diagram, not the full

ake mistakes?

picture. Or it is a silhouette, not the real person. Although the law had “the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year,” it was not able to make the worshippers complete, and it could not cleanse their consciences (verse 2). “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (verse 4).

So when Christ came into the world, He said (quoting one of the Psalms) that sacrifices were not what God really wanted (verse 5). And by doing God’s will, Christ did away with the need for sacrifices (verses 9, 18). Christ did what they could only symbolise, and now that the reality is here, we no longer need the picture. The sacrifices were only a temporary command, given to the nation of Israel until Christ would come and fulfil what the sacrifices symbolised.

God gave these commands—but He did not give them to us. We can’t assume that “if they were good enough for Israel, they are good enough for us.” No, in this case we would be wrong to try to do what Israel was commanded to do. We are a different people.

I use the example of sacrifices because it is something that all Christians agree on. These commandments given to Israel do not apply to us today. God Himself, in the Scriptures, has told us so.

Earlier in the book of Hebrews, we are told that “there must also be a change of the law.”⁶ The subject in that chapter is the priesthood. The Law of Moses said that only Levites could be priests. But Jesus Christ is our priest now, and the fact that He is a priest (even though He is not a Levite) shows that there has been a change in the law. The law that restricted the priesthood to Levites is no longer in force. The Eternal’s laws have changed.

So, Chapter 7 in the book of Hebrews tells us, “The former regulation is *set aside* because it was weak and useless (for the

law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God” (verses 18-19). We draw near to God by Jesus Christ, of course, but notice those strong words about the law that God had given: It was *weak* and *useless*. It told people that they were sinful, but it could not cleanse their consciences. It could not forgive their sins. It was not the way that God was trying to save people. It had only a temporary purpose.

Later, we are told that there was something wrong with the first covenant (the agreement that God made with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai). The people couldn’t keep their part of the deal. God knew they couldn’t, but He made the covenant with them, anyway. It would be like us making a contract to sell our house for ten million dollars, knowing full well that the “buyer” didn’t have any money. Something is wrong with an agreement like that. God made this agreement with Israel even though He knew that they couldn’t live up to the bargain.

God had a purpose in this, of course. It was one step in His purpose to bring us salvation. But it was just a preparatory step. It was designed to show that people could not keep laws. We need a Saviour, not more and better laws. We need supernatural rescue, not more guidance and teaching.

A temporary law

Paul asks, “What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come.”⁷ It was a temporary addition, designed from the start to be in force only until Christ came. That is why sacrifices and offerings are no longer needed. The same law that restricted the priesthood to Levites, the same law that commanded animal sacrifices, is all swept away by the coming of Christ.

“The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ,”⁸ Paul writes.

“Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”⁹ The law that Moses gave no longer supervises our relationship with God. We do not look to Levitical priests or sacrifices or rituals or anything else that is found only in the Law of Moses. Instead, we look to Christ. We trust in Him for our salvation, not in our ability to keep laws.

Paul says the same thing in a different way in Ephesians 2. There he discusses the laws that separated Jews and Gentiles, laws that Jews had to keep to make them different from Gentiles. (Many of the laws we mentioned above were never given to Gentiles, and God did not expect Gentiles to keep them; they would cause Jews to be different from Gentiles. This purpose is specifically mentioned for some laws, such as in Leviticus 20:24-25.)

The law created a barrier between the two peoples, and it created some hostility between them. But Christ destroyed this barrier “by abolishing in His flesh the law with its commandments and regulations.”¹⁰ He did this, Paul says, to reconcile both people to God through His cross.¹¹

Jesus did not die to remove human-made laws. In God’s sight, human religious laws were never in force in the first place. But Jesus’ death did set aside God-made laws, such as animal sacrifices, because they had been designed in advance to cease when Christ died. In this way Jesus removed laws that separated Jews from Gentiles. This includes animal sacrifices and many other laws. Now, God does not have different rules for Jews and for Gentiles.

The laws of Moses have fulfilled their purpose, and now there is no need for anyone to offer sacrifices or do the old rituals. As it says in Hebrews, the old covenant is “obsolete.”¹² Laws that the Eternal gave are indeed obsolete. Not because we are tired of them or think they are old-fashioned, not because church history says so, but because God Himself says so in Scripture. □

¹ Malachi 3:6; James 1:17
² Exodus 3:14
³ Genesis 22:2
⁴ Joshua 6:2-5
⁵ Matthew 10:5-6
⁶ Hebrews 7:12
⁷ Galatians 3:19
⁸ Galatians 3:24
⁹ Galatians 3:25
¹⁰ Ephesians 2:14-15
¹¹ Ephesians 2:16
¹² Hebrews 8:13

The Christi

The man named Christian walks a long, difficult, and confusing path in his quest for Mt. Zion. He carries a Book and a very heavy backpack. As he journeys he is wearied by a hill called Difficulty, and bewildered by numerous forks in the road. He confronts the ugly Giant Despair, slogs through the Slough of Despond, and passes through the Valley of Humiliation, the town of Fairspeech, and the city of Carnal Policy.

As Christian journeys he meets other fellow travellers, including Worldly Wiseman, Legality, Formalist, Worldly Glory, and Little Faith, all of them try to influence him as he ponders which path to

take. These misguided but rather convincing folks all add to his consternation and bewilderment as to how to reach his destination. Some of Christian's companions fall prey to smooth talk and end up walking some difficult dead-end paths. Fortunately Christian meets Faithful who provides friendship and encouragement. And there is Interpreter who helps him understand the Book. He meets Comforter who eases his difficulties, and he also finds Evangelist who clearly points the way to Mt. Zion.

Near the end of his tedious journey Christian struggles up a path leading to a hilltop. As



by
Paul Hailey

he looks up and sees the Cross his backpack falls to the ground, tumbles into a grave, and disappears from sight. Christian no longer has to carry his weighty burden and his journey becomes much easier.

Christian is the main character of John Bunyan's famous book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. He wrote this allegory of the Christian journey in 1675. It might as well have been written today.

Our walk with the Lord

Like the man Christian, we may start our Christian journey not knowing which way to go. Our walk with the Lord begins simply by accepting Him as our Lord and Saviour. Jesus accepts all who come to Him. In Peter's first sermon He quoted from the Old Testament book of Joel, saying these words, "And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."¹

Jesus is always with us on our Christian journey, but He does not control our every thought and action. We can easily go our own way, being misled by our own thoughts, passions and temptations, or from wrong teachings. We should plan our Christian walk very carefully.

As modern-day Christians we too are perplexed by Difficulty, face Despair, and at times may not know which path to take. We may become confused to the point that we are ready to listen to Legality or Little Faith, or other misguided rogues who lead us onto dead-end paths. The world is full of deceivers and people who are deceived, yet who claim to be Christian. The Apostle Paul spoke of "evil men and imposters" who deceive others and who are deceived themselves.²

We should not accept all that we hear or read, but should carefully test everything in the light of scripture. We need to let the Book be our guide, proving all things, whether they are true or false. "Test all things; hold fast what is good."³



an journey

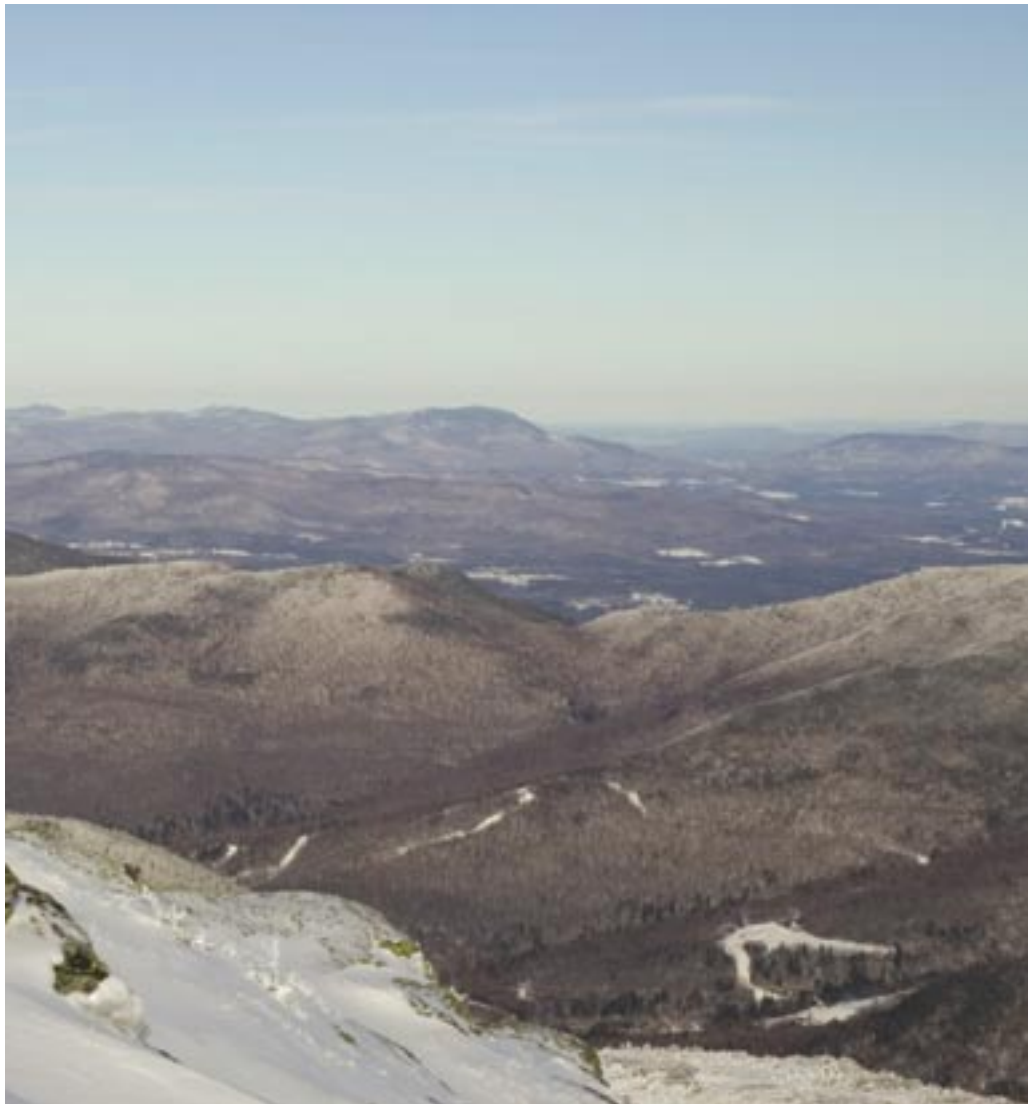
We should seek out Christian teachers and pastors who faithfully understand, apply, and teach the Word of God.

Like Christian, we too need to walk with the Faithful, listen to Evangelist, and welcome Comforter. We should find companionship with others who are walking the Christian path, and share mutual advice and encouragement. In our moments of weariness and confusion we should turn a deaf ear to Worldly Wiseman and his fellow knaves—smooth talkers who can take us on unpleasant side trips.

Christian found relief from Comforter. Jesus referred to the Holy Spirit as the Comforter. We should invite the Holy Spirit into our lives through prayer and Bible study. The Holy Spirit works inside us, comforting us and giving us understanding of the ways of God. “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceeds from the Father, He shall testify of me.”⁴

Christian carried a backpack, symbolic of the baggage of guilt, fear, and shame we all carry as a result of a lifetime of mistakes. We too can dump that burden when we truly see the cross for all that it represents—it was on the cross that Jesus died in our place, paying the penalty for our sins once and for all. Romans 6:23 reminds us that “...the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.” Jesus paid it all, setting us free and promising everlasting life to all who accept His sacrifice.

John Bunyan gave priceless advice in 1675, and it is still priceless today. Let’s avoid the cynics and doubters. Instead let’s walk with the wise and faithful. And above all, let’s look at the cross and all it represents—victory over sin, victory over all the burdens of this life, and eventually victory over the burden of death.



Looking to Jesus

Christian finished his journey to Mt. Zion where he found everlasting joy. We will too if we look to Jesus. Our Lord can make our journey easier. He had to struggle up that hill too, the hill where He died to pay the penalty of our sins.

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”⁵

Jesus gave us a precious promise. “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life, and I will raise

him up at the last day.”⁶

Never forget, we can have complete confidence in Him. “Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.”⁷

Like they say, a journey begins with a single step. Once we take that step, our Lord will be with us all the way, even when we wander off the path. Our Christian journey may be long and difficult, but in the end it will lead to everlasting life when our Lord will receive us with joy, holy and blameless in His sight. □

¹ Acts 2:21

² 2 Timothy 3:13

³ 1 Thessalonians 5:21

⁴ John 15:26

⁵ Hebrews 12:2

⁶ John 6:40

⁷ Philippians 1:6

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