

THE Plain Truth

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A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Sep–Nov 2006

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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Integrity matters

BEIM (Business Ethics Institute of Malaysia) recently conducted a survey on the integrity of several professions in Malaysia. Interestingly, this survey has a resemblance to the findings of a similar research conducted by Mori, an opinion research organisation in Britain. Doctors came up first followed by teachers, professors and priests. Business leaders ranked second last and politicians were rated at the very bottom of the 15-category list.

What is integrity? Integrity is the quality of always behaving according to the moral principles you believe in, so that people respect and trust you. It is a state of sound entity or moral wholeness when we are true to ourselves and have oneness in personality.

Integrity is rooted in a person's character. A person of integrity will have character qualities like being whole, sound, upright, good, ethical, fair, truthful, honest, trustworthy, incorruptible, blameless, credible, disciplined and responsible.

There is no doubt that integrity is important in all walks of life. Men and women of integrity naturally win our trust and respect. Children look up to parents and adults who have integrity. Marriage certainly can last long when husband and wife practise integrity. On the other hand, politicians, business leaders, public figures and celebrities who are involved in scandals are often exposed as "corrupt, dishonest and untrustworthy". This is due to the lack of integrity in their character traits.

The welfare of a country not only depends on the integrity of rulers and government servants but also every ordinary citizen. What does it take then to become a person of integrity?

No child is born with the virtue of integrity. It is a quality of character that has to be nurtured and practised in daily living. Integrity is intimately linked to character education at home. Learning morality and ethics begin at early childhood. Parents

should teach moral principles of right and wrong behaviour, and be a good role model for children to follow. Teachers in schools, colleges and other educational institutions who are honest and upright can undoubtedly help to reinforce the virtue of integrity in students. Similarly, religious leaders who live a life of integrity can inspire and motivate believers or worshippers to do the same as well.

Becoming a person of integrity is much more than adhering to a code of ethics. It is not merely keeping the dos and don'ts of religious rules of moral conduct. A life of integrity is lived inside out as it needs to come from the heart. It is the willingness to do what is right even when no one is watching. Integrity is about keeping promises, doing what is just, right and good even at great cost and personal sacrifices. Integrity also means one does not serve, give, or help with ulterior motives, not exploiting and taking advantage of people.

Being human, nobody can have absolutely perfect integrity in all situations in our daily life. We needn't be perfect to practise integrity either. We at our very best have varying degrees of integrity in different aspects of our life.

Why is it so difficult for many people to uphold integrity? The root cause is flaws in human nature that result in sinfulness. Sin divides us as a person internally, causing us to be morally unsound. Sin produces conflicting attitudes, desires and motives in us. Sin perverts, opposes and undermines our intentions of doing what is right and good. Apostle Paul experienced this internal conflict when he wrote:

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the

desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."¹

Did Apostle Paul state any spiritual solution to the conflict between good and evil in him when confronted with this moral dilemma or integrity crisis? Yes, he did. He wrote, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord."² In fact, his answer to the integrity problem applies equally to all Christians.

Apostle Paul experienced failure in struggling against sin by his own strength or trying to please God by keeping rules and laws of morality with his own willpower. We must never underestimate the power of sin and Satan's craftiness as a tempter. Christ had defeated sin and Satan, and through Him and God's Spirit we can be empowered to overcome our sinfulness as well.

On the other hand, Christians cannot make lame excuses in sinning by saying "The Devil made me do it." Christians have individual responsibility to resist Satan's temptations and wrestle with sin to gain spiritual victory. Becoming a Christian does not automatically stamp out all sins and temptations from a person's life. Christian's growth in becoming a person of integrity is a lifelong process. It is a strenuous race involving a constant fight of faith. A Christian is committed to combat sinfulness, getting rid of those attitudes and behaviour that oppose Godliness. In exercising faith and trusting God to make us whole we will be more able to develop integrity that God delights in. □

¹ Romans 7:15–20

² Romans 7:24–25

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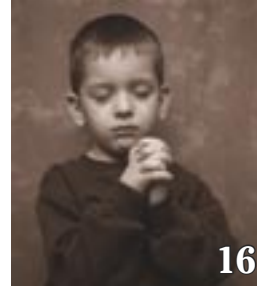
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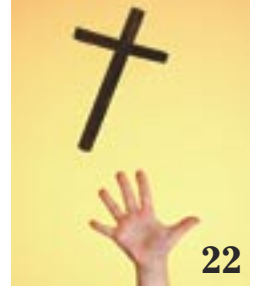
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Managing Editor	Low Mong Chai
Co-ordinator	Susan Low
Editorial & Advisory Committee	Dr. P. Sellappan
	Wong Mein Kong
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	Wong Teck Kong
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Editorial Adviser	John Halford
Design	Richard Low
Design Adviser	John D. Stettaford

Malaysia

Office Address: 55B Jalan Rengas, Taman Selatan, 41000 Klang	Postal Address: Locked Bag 2002, 41990 Klang
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Website: www.wcg-klang.net
Email: ptasia@myjaring.net

Singapore

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

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What our readers say:

I enjoy reading it. It teaches me a lot about life and also broadens my mind. I understand the articles which are very touching and meaningful.

Billy Brundang
Kuching

Some of the articles published are suitable for my daily undertakings. Wherever possible I use your articles to explain whenever there are discussions on Jesus Christ

Christopher Lee
Puchong

I consider myself blessed for the past two issues of THE PLAIN TRUTH that some kind soul had left in my letter box. Having thoroughly enjoyed the thought-provoking articles therein, I am hastening to request you to put me on your mailing list to receive THE PLAIN TRUTH on a regular basis. God Bless.

Ignatius Gomez
Subang Saya

Some of the articles in your magazine are relevant to my life and the magazine also helps me in my walk with God.

Albert Ngiam
Klang

Sometimes it is refreshing to read a magazine that is free of political view or articles of non-violence. The world is already full of violence and war. We don't need to be reminded every second of it. Keep up the good work.

Frank Lim
Kuala Lumpur

The articles in the magazine are very encouraging, helpful and make us aware of God's will for us as His children. THE PLAIN TRUTH has helped me grow very much in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. Thank God for this magazine.

Eileen Cheah
Kuala Lumpur

It helps me understand better about God's plan of salvation plan for mankind. Thanks a lot.



Frankie Tay
Kuala Lumpur

The coverage of Godly subjects in the Western and Eastern world enlightens me. In your work, you are like professional tourist guides showing us the way of God. Thank you and keep up the good work.

Gan Chit Peng
Kuala Lumpur

It makes us understand the whole concept of Christianity better. Keep up the good work.

Khoo Cheng Koy
Sungei Petani

The articles are thought-provoking, religious, informative and teaches the right values in life. Kindly continue sending the magazine. I value them.

K M Nambiar
Sungei Petani

THE PLAIN TRUTH is a wonderful magazine. It helps readers understand the meaning of Christianity and it is especially suitable for the younger generation. As I am in my twilight years and have nothing much to look forward to I would suggest that my free copy be given to the younger generation. I can still refer back to the old issues when I need some peace of mind. Your past services are greatly appreciated.

Lee Khon Yin
Kuala Lumpur

It gives me more understanding of God's words. It makes me draw closer to God by helping me continuously to understand the explanations and examples with reference to the Bible. Indeed, I enjoy reading all the articles written. The usage of English is perfect. Thank you for sending me this free magazine.

Stephen Ugo
Sibu

It provides me with a great spiritual reading source. It enlightens me on

many issues of my Christian faith. It helps me to be a better Christian and understand others better.

Reading THE PLAIN TRUTH makes me aware that we Christians all pray to the same God—our Lord Jesus Christ.

Tan Ban King
Kulim

It has information on Christian faith, preaching and telling us the facts of life. Thank you all these years for sending this beautiful magazine to us. May God bless all the employees and management of THE PLAIN TRUTH.

Wong Chee Wah
Kuala Lumpur

This magazine relates daily happenings in the world to our human behaviour. It is very encouraging and guides us in our walk with the Living God with faith.

Yong Cheng Moo
Johor Bahru

I do give talks on certain topics from the Bible and on Christian values and living applicable to our daily lives. Your wonderful magazine is most useful to me. I do use some of your information or written articles for presentation to the people I give talks to. Thank you.

Christopher Hew
Subang Jaya.

Please accept our small donation for the good and useful work done by your organisation.

K. L. Yee

ED. Your generosity is much appreciated!

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.

The chink in death's armour

Get a load of this lead sentence from Reuters:

*Fri Dec 2, 11:22 AM ET
NEW YORK (Reuters Health)—
Women who go through
menopause in their early 40s
may have a slightly higher risk of
death later in life compared with
their peers, a large U.S. study
suggests.*

Imagine it, a slightly higher risk of death later in life. Apparently, some women have a slightly *lower* risk of death later in life. Death must not be as inevitable as we all thought. Hmmm. Who pays for these studies, anyway?

Actually, of course, the study itself made sense—it showed that women who go through menopause in their early 40s may not live quite as long after the age of 75 as women who go through menopause later than their early 40s.

The presentation was misleading—not the study. Sometimes it's like that with the gospel, too.

Presented poorly, even the gospel can be misunderstood. And sad to say, there's a lot of that going around these days.

The gospel is actually good news. It exposes the chink that Jesus put in death's armour. It promises a new life beyond death, a life rich in joy, peace, friendship and love. A life in harmony with a God who loves you and wants you with Him no matter who you are, where

you've been or what you've done.

But it's not always presented that way. Sometimes it's presented as a way to get big cars, big houses and fancy clothes right now. Just "name it and claim it," people are told.

Sometimes it's presented as an austere framework of rules and regulations overseen by an angry God who'll roast you forever if you don't toe the line.

Sometimes it's presented as a glorious pyramid scheme in which the more pious salespeople you fast-talk into joining, the greater your eternal income will be.

Jesus said, "Let your light shine



by
**Michael
Fezell**

imagine what a positive reputation the good news could have.

If only we could present the gospel the way it really is, as a new life in Christ, a life of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (see Galatians 5:22–23) instead of as some wacky caricature that misrepresents both the gospel and Jesus.

I wonder if there might be some merit in placing our emphasis on being the kind of people that Jesus said His disciples would be rather than just telling people what to believe. Wouldn't that win more

people over to the real power of the gospel?

The chink in death's armour is love, after all, not memorised testimonies. Testimonies have their place, but it's love, God's love, that overthrows death and hell. And people can digest genuine, godly love a whole lot easier than fast talk, pushy questions and judgmental frowns. The proof is in the pudding, not in



before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."¹ But some believers let their pushy, memorised spiels so grate before people that given a choice, I suspect that most people would rather live next door to a used car salesman than to a Bible-thumping evangelical Christian.

If we could all do it the way Jesus said to, if we could all let our light shine in such a way that people are won over instead of put off,

reciting the recipe.

Large U.S. studies show that we all have a slightly higher risk of death today than we did yesterday. But because God loves us, because His Son died for us and now lives for us, death has had its teeth pulled. Like the old grey mare, death ain't what it used to be. And that good news is worth living for. Why not show someone today? □

¹ Matthew 5:16

He lives

The New Testament writers insisted that Christians living in their day were experiencing God's living presence. But is He present—and if so, *how* is He present—with those of us who live almost 2,000 years later?

How God is with us

The answer is that today, as in New Testament times, God can live in us through the Holy Spirit. What we need to know is whether we are experiencing the Spirit's indwelling, and if not, how we may do so.

Gordon D. Fee in his book *God's Empowering Presence* repeats a student's telling remark about the Holy Spirit. It points up our often hazy view of the Holy Spirit's nature and activity: "God the Father makes perfectly good sense to me; and God the Son I can quite understand," said the student, "but the Holy Spirit is a gray, oblong blur."

Gray—oblong—blur. Indeed! Certainly not the presence of a personal and powerful God. "The Spirit has become God's specter, if you will," says Fee, "an unseen, less than dynamic, vibrant influence, hardly God...." Such incomplete perspectives are partially due to the fact that the Holy Spirit is just that—spirit. He is, as Jesus said, like the wind and isn't seen.

No footprints

As a Christian scholar once said, "The Holy Spirit leaves no footprints in the sand." Being invisible to our senses, He's easily missed and easily misunderstood. On the other hand, our knowledge of Jesus Christ is set on firmer soil. Because our Savior was a human being, God living among us in human flesh, Jesus Christ has a face for us. And God the Son put a "face" on God the Father as well. Jesus insisted that those who had seen him had "seen" the Father as well.

To be sure, both Father and Son are with Spirit-filled Christians today. But—and this is important—they are present within Christians through the Holy Spirit. That being so, we

by
Paul Kroll



within us

would surely want to know more about and experience the Spirit in a personal way. Through the Spirit, believers experience the closeness of God and are empowered to apply His love.

Our Comforter

For the apostles, John in particular, the Holy Spirit is the Counsellor or Comforter. He is someone called in to help in time of trouble or need. “The Spirit helps us in our weakness,” said Paul. “We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.”¹

Those who are led by the Holy Spirit are God’s people, said Paul. More than this, they are sons and daughters of God, who are able to call Him their Father. By being filled with the Spirit, said the apostle Paul, God’s people are able to live in spiritual freedom. No longer enslaved to the sinful nature, they live new lives of impassioned inspiration and oneness with God. This is the radical change the Holy Spirit creates in people at their conversion.

And their desires are therefore reoriented from this world to God. Paul spoke of this transformation as “the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.”² The presence of the Holy Spirit, then, is the defining reality of conversion. No Spirit; no conversion; no spiritual rebirth. That’s why Paul could say, “If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.”³ (Since God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, “Spirit of Christ” is simply another way of referring to the Holy Spirit.)

On the other hand, if a person is truly converted, Christ will live in him or her through the Holy Spirit. Such people belong to God because He has made them His by imparting His Spirit to them.

Spirit-filled life

The question, then, is this: How

can we have the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and know that the Spirit of God lives in us? The New Testament writers, especially Paul, said empowerment comes as a result of a person’s response to an appeal. The appeal is to accept God’s grace in Jesus Christ, forsake old ways of thinking and to begin to live by the Spirit.

That’s why we need to be encouraged to be *led* by the Spirit, to walk by the Spirit, to live by the Spirit. How to do this is spelled out in broad principle in the books of the New Testament. The apostle Paul insisted that Christians need to “stir up” the Spirit to help them live by virtues that include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.⁴

When understood in a New Testament context, these qualities or “fruit” are more than concepts or good thoughts. They reflect real spiritual power within believers, as given by the Holy Spirit. This strength is waiting to be tapped and put to use in every life circumstance.

When put into action, virtues become the “fruit” or evidence that the Holy Spirit is operating in us. The way to be empowered by the Spirit is to ask God for and then be led by the virtue-creating presence of the Spirit.

The universal body of God’s people led by the Spirit will, in turn, empower the life of the church and its institutions. And that’s the only way the church as a corporate structure can be empowered—by individual believers living by the Spirit. That means we must be careful not to mistake aspects of corporate church life—such as its programs, ceremonies or beliefs—for the Holy Spirit’s dynamic activity *within* the lives of human beings.

Christians in love

The most important evidence or quality of the Holy Spirit’s work

within believers will be love. This quality defines the essence of who God is—and it identifies Spirit-led believers. This love is what the apostle Paul and the other New Testament teachers were always concerned about first and foremost. They wanted to know whether individual Christian lives were being empowered and transformed by the love of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual gifts, church service and inspired teaching were (and are) important for the church. To Paul, however, of vastly more importance was the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit’s love within believers in Christ:

Paul could speak “in the tongues of men and of angels.”⁵ But if he lacked love, he said he was nothing but a noisemaker.

Paul could also “have the gift of prophecy,” be able to “fathom all mysteries and all knowledge” and even “have a faith that can move mountains.”⁶ But if he lacked love, he was nothing. Not even a storehouse of biblical knowledge, theological orthodoxy or strong beliefs could substitute for the empowerment of the Spirit’s love.

Paul could even say, “If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.”⁷ Not even doing good works for their own sake should be confused with the working of the Holy Spirit in love.

Real Christians

What is crucial for believers is the active presence of the Holy Spirit. Paul insists that the true people of God—real Christians—are those who have been renewed, reborn and, therefore, transformed to reflect God’s love in their lives. There is only one way this transformation can take place in us. It is through a life led and lived by the love of the indwelling Holy Spirit. And it is God the Holy Spirit who is the personal presence of God in our hearts and minds. □

¹ Romans 8:26

² Titus 3:5

³ Romans 8:9

⁴ Galatians 5:22–23

⁵ 1 Corinthians 13:1

⁶ 1 Corinthians 13:2

⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:3

The spirit of

Not a day goes by without some tragedy, disaster, or crime afflicting people in different parts of the world. Even in our own country we read in our newspapers and watch the television news about accidents, crimes, poverty and other misfortunes affecting people from all walks of life. Though such incidents are ever present, we consider Malaysia as a peaceful and safe country in which to live and



by
**Devaraj
Ramoo**

harmony that we enjoy?

Quite often we take things for granted. We have ample food to eat and cosy houses in which to live. Nobody starves in this country. No one is living in tents because of devastating earthquakes. No one is denied medical attention because a doctor cannot be reached at any time for medical help. How often have we stopped to ponder our good fortune and taken time to

unexpected happens. Only when tragedy or illness strikes do they stop to take stock of their lives. Most of the time there is no time to thank anyone let alone God, and this is one of our greatest weaknesses in life. The lack of a spirit of thankfulness in our hearts and minds puts us in the category of the ungrateful because few of us reflect on the unique blessings that mankind has received from God for



raise our children. Compared with some of the sufferings of people especially in war-torn nations we are a very blessed lot; however, are we always appreciative of the peace and

give thanks to God?

Most people carry on their daily routines declaring that they have very little or no time to accomplish all their set agenda until something

creating us in His own image.

Does God expect words of thanks from us? Could He possibly be expecting expressions of thanks from us on a regular basis? As

thankfulness

Christians, perhaps we need to look at the life of His son Jesus Christ who dwelled among mankind almost 2,000 years ago for an answer. Christ's way of life is a perfect example of what God expects from each of us. Jesus regularly came to God in prayer, and one of the most profound ways He approached the Father was with a heart full of thanks for the Eternal. He thanked God at every opportunity especially when He performed His greatest miracles. It's interesting to note that He always took time to thank God *before* the miracle was performed. Before Christ raised Lazarus from the dead He said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard Me and I know that You always hear Me."¹ This was said within earshot of all the people gathered around and even before there was any hint of what He was planning to do. In another situation where He had to feed more than 5,000 people, He gave a prayer of thanks before He multiplied seven loaves of bread and some fish to provide for the multitude gathered around Him.² Jesus demonstrates for us that His faith always went hand in hand with a spirit of thankfulness. He also revealed to us that giving thanks is actually an act of worship and is given the highest priority when coming to God.

Do we give enough thanks to God? Why is it so difficult for many to say a simple thank you for the things received from God? Indeed, it's time to examine what God Himself thinks of the thankless attitudes people have. The Bible has given us a list of the attitudes that He particularly hates.³ Among others this list includes disobedience to parents, being unthankful, unholy, unloving and unforgiving. We need to realise that being unthankful is ranked together with being unholy. All our praying and 'holy' acts mean nothing to God if we harbour an unthankful spirit within us. Something happens to a person

when thanklessness sets in. The apostle Paul describes an unwillingness to give thanks as leading to one's thoughts becoming futile and foolishness setting in which results in evil behaviour.⁴ Sadly, it has become fashionable not to acknowledge or thank God. Even during the Christmas season many seem to eliminate the name of Christ and instead greet each other with "Happy holidays."

In the book of Psalms many of the praises to God reflect an overwhelming mood of thankfulness to God. Why? When we give thanks to God wholeheartedly it means that we know our God and experience Him in our lives. Sincere thanks only arise when we are truly in an active relationship with God. Even on a human plane, have you noticed how cold a 'thank you' sounds when it comes from a person who has to say it because it's a requirement of the job? Compare this with a person who is full of gratefulness because he has received some form of help or gift from someone he knows. The more we come to know God, the more will our hearts yearn to thank Him for the things that we have received. Therefore thanksgiving honours God.

Giving thanks to God is also an effective gauge or measurement of our faith in Him. People who abound in faith will reflect it with an outpouring of continuous thanksgiving throughout their lives.⁵ If we find we are not always giving thanks perhaps we need to reassess our faith. Often a different mindset takes over which is fault-finding. There are people who seem to find fault in every situation. Their lives are filled with constant grumbling, criticism and judgmental attitudes towards others. They even blame God for their problems. Such people not only make others feel miserable but plague their own lives with unhappiness. A thankful heart gives an immense boost to one's

self-esteem and changes the entire outlook towards life.

There is another very important reason why we should constantly show appreciation to God: God expects it of us.⁶ An interesting event in the Bible illustrates this. In Luke's gospel is an account of ten lepers who begged Jesus to heal them. Leprosy was a disease that meant being an outcast in society and thus the ten lepers would have been suffering immensely in their lives. Jesus, touched with compassion for their plight, healed all the ten but only one man had the heart and presence of mind to return to thank Jesus for what He had done for him.⁷ Jesus openly questioned why the other nine could not come to give thanks. Are we among the nine?

Perhaps some may question what is there to thank God for? For a start we could show our Creator our appreciation for the very lives that we have. The gift of life is the most precious blessing that we have. When humanity sinned, God didn't abandon us to face death for all eternity. Instead He again demonstrated His love for mankind by sending Jesus Christ who took upon Himself the sins of mankind and paid the penalty for our sins by His death on the cross. Thus, through the sacrifice of Christ, God opened the doors of eternal life to all human beings. Is there anything more important than this for us to thank God?

One way we can show our heartfelt thanks to God is by bringing the good news of God's love to others. This magazine and every article in it is an expression of thanks for the wonderful gift of eternal life that God has promised to those who trust Him in their lives. We can be filled with the spirit of thankfulness as we read it, and we can demonstrate our thankfulness by helping others to read it too. Donations from readers help us to send free copies to people in need of God's words. ☐

¹ John 11:41–43

² Matthew 15:36

³ 2 Timothy 3:1–4

⁴ Romans 1:21

⁵ Colossians 2:6–7

⁶ 1 Thessalonians 5:18

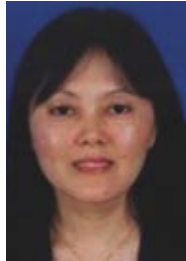
⁷ Luke 17:12–18

Unity in

A non-Christian friend wanted to know why there are so many different churches. A fair question. My Christian friend answered: “Each one is man-made.” She didn’t probe further and so the matter was considered closed. The question, however, continued to haunt me time and again. Soon after, I found a book entitled “*The Complete Idiot’s Guide to the Reformation and Protestantism*”¹ which rekindled my hope to gain a deeper understanding of this same question. This book explains how the Reformation came about, who its numerous leaders were, and why so many different denominations and beliefs emerged from it. In the Foreword, Jerry Root rightfully says: “*The Complete Idiot’s Guide to the Reformation and Protestantism* opens a door for the readers to an important part of the past and may equally open some doors to understanding the future.”

Knowledge

I was taken aback by the sad part of church history where a series of religious wars, inquisitions, persecutions and martyrdoms cost the lives of untold millions in Europe. Somehow, the Christian-on-Christian persecutions and conflicts were an unavoidable prelude to the “reform” of the Reformation. Part of the tragedy was because of sharp disagreement over personal interpretations of the meaning of scripture, in what was basically the same religion. In time, numerous Christian denominations, with different theological positions, sprang up. Even to this day, differences in beliefs and practices can trigger “tensions and disputes” among Christian



by
Stefanie Tai

communities. But fortunately with the rise of religious tolerance and lessons (good and bad) learned from its “ugly” past, not all Christian “feuds” today result in the deadly effects of the Reformation. Even so, followers of Christ should persist in finding common ground or mutual acceptance, concentrating on what unites them rather than on what divides them.

Unity

In Saint Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (and all believers everywhere), he stresses the unity

of all believers. In particular, Saint Paul gives seven areas where Christians must agree in order to attain true unity of the Spirit²:

- **One body:** The Church, the Body of Jesus Christ³ is made up of diverse Christians of every race and nation. Though many, we are unified as one Body of believers, functioning together as God’s human instruments for His service, and to reach out to others in personal service, as well as to spread the good news of salvation around the world.

- **One Spirit:** God the Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Godhead. He guides the church into all truth⁴ and provides spiritual gifts for the work of the gospel. He lives in us, empowers and transforms us into the image of Christ. But we must be sensitive to the lead of the Spirit instead of self-pride and prejudices that seek to divide us.

- **One hope:** We all live in eager expectation of the same hope of salvation in Christ, and eternal life in His Kingdom—whatever our differences.

- **One Lord:** God the Son, Jesus Christ, is the second Person of the Godhead. He is appointed by God to be the Head over everything for the church. He instituted the Lord’s Supper as a remembrance of Him—He came as a servant to die for us, to take away our sins⁵. Our participation in the Lord’s Supper or Communion acknowledges that we belong to Him as a result of what He has done for us. He helps us to do our individual part in building up His church as we commit to follow His lead.

- **One faith:** When God



diversity

saves us, He gives us faith. And it is through this faith in Christ's sacrificial death, and not by good deeds that we are saved.⁶ While good deeds cannot earn our salvation, deeds of loving service and a transformed life is a verification of our true faith in Christ.

- **One baptism:**

Baptism is a participation in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. It symbolises the death and burial of our old way of life and resurrection to a new way of life with Christ. We have been baptised into Christ's one spiritual Body⁷, not so much into "man-made" physical organisations. And having been baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, we become family members—brothers and sisters—in God's household⁸.

- **One God and Father:** God the Father is the first Person of the Godhead. He is the source of our physical existence and by His grace, through Christ, the source of our spiritual life in eternity.

Basic teachings that point to the "oneness of all believers", like these, are the ones that need to be stressed and safeguarded. They form part of the foundation of our Christian faith. While differences in the interpretations of God's Word by others are to be respected, they ought not sidetrack or divide us. God intends for His family to be one in spirit, one in purpose and one in deed.



Unity in Christ

This is a command from Jesus Christ Himself: "Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples."⁹ How can we do that? By exercising humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love¹⁰. By not bickering, judging and feeling spiritually superior over those who differ from our practices, simply because we believe we have the "correct" reading of the Scriptures. Our worship, traditions and practices may help us draw closer to God, but it is not right nor should we criticise fellow Christians whose practices differ

from ours. Such destructive attitudes only serve to tear down a unified church that Christ wants to build. What is more important is that we all worship Christ in different ways, and we should not argue over how we should worship Him. Ultimately, we are all responsible to Him alone.

The demonstration of Christ's love in the form of positive, beneficial and productive relationships among our varied Christian fellowship give evidence that we are Christ's disciples. Knowing that we are called by the Father should unify us, even though we might differ in response. Further, Christ prayed that Christians should be unified as a powerful testimony to the reality of God's love¹¹. Knowing that Christ prayed for us should give us confidence and impetus to constantly work towards unity and to maintain harmonious relationships among our different fellowship. In short, as Christ's one Body of believers, we are to work with one another, not against each other.

In God's good time, when His Body of believers assembles in heaven, it will include believers "out of every tribe and language and people and nation"¹². Until then, we are instructed to "always keep ourselves united in the Holy Spirit and in the bond of peace"¹³.

In the meantime it is up to each Christian, of whatever fellowship or denomination, to stress the unity of Christ, amidst the diversity of the individual's response to God's calling. □

¹ By Bell Sr., J. S. & Sumner, T. M.

² Ephesians 4:4–6

³ Ephesians 1:23

⁴ John 16:13

⁵ 1 Corinthians 11:23–26

⁶ Ephesians 2:8–9

⁷ Romans 6:3

⁸ Ephesians 2:19

⁹ John 13:34–35

¹⁰ Ephesians 4:2

¹¹ John 17:20–25

¹² Revelations 5:9

¹³ Ephesians 4:3

Findin

“I found it!”—a sudden rash of bumper stickers boldly proclaimed some years ago. They referred to the discovery of God, the discovery of a new life in Christ. Most bumper-sticker readers gave fleeting attention to the message. Some were irritated. They began to display a bumper sticker of their own: “I never lost it!”

The truth is, however, we’ve *all* lost it—“it” being the intimate and personal relationship Christians can have with God. We had this relationship and we lost it—in our first parents, Adam and Eve. God created them in His image to mirror His character and His righteousness.

The ultimate purpose of all humans is to reflect God’s glory forever, and in so doing, to partake of God’s immeasurable joy. Human beings were made to be in contact with God—in an intimate relationship with Him. Deep and enduring joy comes only from personally knowing Him.

Our first parents had that personal contact with God. They could have maintained that relationship, enjoying all the benefits and delights that were part of it. If they had, how different the human story would have been! Unfortunately, humanity’s stay in paradise was brief. A rebellious, lying spirit entered the picture. Satan seduced Adam and Eve, telling them that if they disobeyed God, they would find even greater happiness than they had. Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, and they fell or crashed into a state of sin. They made a choice that changed everything.

Alienated from God

Sin is contrary to God’s righteousness and holiness, and works against all that God represents. Sin produces misery, suffering and grief. God does not approve of sin because it hurts people. He does not compromise or coexist with sin.

Once Adam and Eve opened the door to sin and rebellion, they alienated themselves from God. They exchanged righteousness and

by
Clayton Steep

holiness for sin and evil. And it wasn’t only Adam and Eve who sinned. Everyone—the entire human race—has followed in their footsteps. That’s why Paul wrote in Romans 3: “There is no one righteous, not even one” (verse 10); “all have turned away” (verse 12); and “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (verse 23).

Each of us has a sinful nature that spiritually alienates us from God. We are sinful. No aspect of our nature is untainted by sin. Until sin’s hold is broken, it reigns over us. Sin is more than what we *do*—sin is what we *are*. Sin forms a wall that separates us from fellowship with God and from the inexhaustible richness of His blessings in Christ. Sin not only separates humans from God in this life, its result—death—separates sinners from God forever.

For us to be reconciled to God, sin had to be taken out of the way. The barrier had to be broken down so we could find Him. That is why God came in human flesh as Jesus Christ. So greatly did God want us to be reconciled to Him that He provided for the penalty of our sin be paid in our stead. “For God so loved the world,” John 3:16 simply but eloquently states, “that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

When Jesus was nailed to the cross, “He suffered death, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.”¹ Because Jesus paid the penalty, our sins can now be forgiven. “In Him we have

redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that He lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding.”²

The way back

God’s greatest desire is for us to find our way back to Him—to find Him. To an audience of



unbelievers, Paul spoke about God’s desire that people “would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.”³ So greatly does God want us to find Him that in Jesus Christ He paid the ultimate price to make it possible.

But where is God that sinners may reach out for Him and find Him? Actually, He is everywhere. He is, as we have read, “not far from each one of us.” We humans have lost contact with God, but He has not lost track of us. He knows everything about us. “Can

g God

anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares the Lord; "Do not I fill heaven and earth?"⁴

God is near. He is next to the bed of the infirm. He is in the cell of the lonely prisoner. He is as accessible to us when we are riding high in life as He is when we hit bottom. Whatever our status or condition,

person feels incomplete. He or she feels an inner emptiness, a longing for fulfilment. We all need a lasting relationship with God.

And we should have it. But people have tried to fill this spiritual void with inferior substitutes, among them sensual pleasures, material possessions, fame, and worldly pursuits. At best, they

yield temporary exhilaration. But it is just that: temporary.

C.S. Lewis said: "We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." (*The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses*, page 2) Instead of the mud pies with which we seek to satisfy our inner longings, God offers us infinite joy, lasting joy. Why settle for less when we don't have to?

we need only to reach out for Him in repentance. When we accept and sincerely believe in Jesus Christ and repent of our sins, our sins are pardoned. The barrier that kept us from a joyful relationship with God is removed.

Our first birth did not make us spiritually complete persons. That is why Jesus said we must be "born again."⁵ "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"⁶

God designed us to experience the satisfaction of an ever-increasing knowledge of Him. But, without the Holy Spirit, a

A joyful relationship

On becoming a Christian, a person enters an intimate relationship. One becomes a child of God, a new creation of God. Christians who have entered this relationship have "found" God. They have what is most important in life. Nothing else is essential for joy. Not riches, not fame, not pleasures, not even health. Though they add to one's happiness in Christ, they cannot of themselves yield lasting contentment. What matters most is the joy that comes from being forgiven, from being reconciled

to God through Christ and from communion with Him.

In one of His kingdom parables, Jesus spoke of the joy in finding God. He said: "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field."⁷ Jesus was not teaching that to become a Christian one must sell all earthly possessions. The point of the parable is that the discovery of the kingdom of God gives more joy than anything else in the world.

And the initial joy a newly converted Christian receives is only the beginning! Finding God is not merely like finding a gold coin. Rather, it is like finding an inexhaustible gold mine. It takes a whole lifetime extracting the riches of this mine. The more you mine it, the more pure and abundant its yield.

Once we find God, we begin to find fulfilment in life. And we set out on the most important of all quests—to know God. J. I. Packer expresses it well in *Knowing God*: "What makes life worthwhile is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance; and this the Christian has in a way that no other person has. For what higher, more exalted, and more compelling goal can there be than to know God?" (page 34)

We come to know God in two ways, both essential. One is to become familiar with the Bible, which describes God's actions, desires and emotions. The other is to learn to trust Him by doing His will. The resulting vital, growing relationship with God is the basis for a meaningful life here and now. But it goes beyond that. It is the basis of our hope for immortality.

Jesus prayed to His Father concerning His followers, saying, "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."⁸ You may know *about* God, but your assurance of eternal life comes from knowing *Him*. And you begin by finding Him. □

¹ Hebrews 2:9

² Ephesians 1:7–8

³ Acts 17:27

⁴ Jeremiah 23:24

⁵ John 3:3

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:17

⁷ Matthew 13:44

⁸ John 17:3

What time

How many times a day do we ask the question, “What time is it?”

Sounds like a simple enough matter until we take the time to think about it. Then we realise it isn't so simple at all.

Consider this: Before the 1800s, time-keeping was a local event. In Medieval Europe the town clockmaker was the key man. He would set official time geared to whenever the sun reached its zenith each day. This was hardly precise. When we advanced to pocket watches, people travelling between cities often had to adjust their clock, literally, from time to time.

Then came the railways in the 1800s. Because of scheduling issues, concern over freight rates and critical delivery of perishables, time issues became much more crucial. In 1878, a Canadian, Sandford Fleming, became a national hero by dividing the world into the 24 time zones we use today.

So, the United States has nine time zones spanning from Maine to Guam, and we are all familiar with Pacific, Mountain, Central and Eastern time. The former Soviet Union had 12 time zones! Even today, all of giant, sprawling Russia is on permanent Daylight Savings Time, and each region is an hour ahead of the actual time on record.

Pretty complicated stuff, eh?

God's time

It took the Standard Time Act of 1918 for the U.S. Congress to make our four time zones mandatory. Otherwise the wheels of commerce would quickly grind to a halt. Time is even more important to God, and the biblical approach to time is a little more delightfully complicated than it at first seems.

Richard Kromer aptly summarised the biblical approach to time: “History has a beginning in God, it has its center in Christ and its end in the final consummation and the Last Judgment.”

Right. The Bible has a lot of respect for time. God is working out His

purposes across time. On the other hand, God is not strictly bound by time, either.

Looked at one way, time is a created entity. One day is the amount of time the earth rotates on its axis. One year is the measurement of its orbit around the sun. But it is different on Mars or Venus. Thus time, in this sense, is a material, relative entity. But this is only one way of reckoning time.

by
**Joseph Tkach
&
Neil Earle**



In the Greek New Testament many words allude to time. One is *chronos*, from which we get our word *chronology*. This is the kind of time we are familiar with—the ticking of the clock, the realm of time and space we all inhabit.

The Bible pays attention to this linear way of measuring. “Teach us to number our days aright,” sang Moses, “that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”¹ And Jesus asked: “Are there not twelve hours of daylight?”²

But another altogether different word for time is also used in the New Testament. That word is

kairos. (One more, *ainos*, refers to duration, but *kairos* will be our focus in this article.)

Kairos is the “fullness of time,” God’s time zone. *Kairos* time conveys notions of unboundness, of fluidity, of God’s purposes intersecting and overruling this finite world of chronological time. *Kairos* thus refers to opportunity, as Carl Henry writes in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. It represents “the arena of man’s decision on his way to an eternal destiny” (page 1096).

The *kairos* moment

Kairos thus conveys a more exciting concept than simple *chronos*. *Kairos* refers to specially selected periods of divine determination. It operates within profane human time but mainly as the focus of the fulfilment of God’s ultimate purposes.

When Jesus came the first time it was a definite *kairos* moment—a time of fulfilment, a time of judgment and a time for God’s promises to become operative.³

Note this from the book of Titus: “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect... which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time [Greek *chronon* from “*chronos*”] and at His appointed season [*kairos*] He brought His word to light.”⁴

God created time, and in His sovereign *kairos* time He interacts and enters into *chronos* time according to His perfect will. This is one reason life with God is so exciting—we are not predetermined, the future is open to us and we are open to it.

New Testament writers related *kairos* to two cardinal events. These were times of repentance and times of God’s choosing to accomplish His mighty purpose. Once again, *kairos* refers to decisive turning points within the larger sweep of chronological time.

This concept of decisive moments has its roots in Old

me is it?

Testament thought. In the book of Daniel, the prophet appealed to vain King Nebuchadnezzar to get busy changing his ways right now to avoid future punishment.⁵

This sense of a divine turning point—“now is the time, now is the hour”—is central to *kairos* time. It helps us understand Paul’s earnest appeal to the wise men of Athens: “In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now He commands all people everywhere to repent.”⁶ That “but now” is *kairos* time.

Kairos thus conveys expectation and excitement, times of decision, as stated by the author of Hebrews, quoting the psalmist: “Today, if you will hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”⁷ The *kairos* theme is reiterated in the next chapter: “Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later He spoke through David, as was said before, ‘Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.’”⁸

The central *kairos*

Germans speak of *Der Tag*—a specially appointed time calling for decision. In World War Two we had June 6, 1944, D-Day, a chronological date on the calendar but also much, much more. D-Day conveys urgency, importance, a call for momentous things to occur.

In that connection, note Carl Henry’s words: “While the New Testament gives prominent scope to the future... its central *kairos* is the life and death and resurrection of the incarnate Christ, which is decisively significant for the kingdom of God. The terms, ‘day [of the Lord]’ and ‘hour,’ ‘now’ and ‘today’ gain dramatic significance in the New Testament context whenever the eternal order impinges upon the sweep of ordinary events” (*EDT*, page 1095).

Thus *kairos* helps clarify another theme of Scripture, the fact that in the view of biblical writers the end time had already begun with the appearance and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice Hebrews 1:1–2, “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days He has spoken unto us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things.”

Now consider the implications of what we have been saying. Here are four.

First, in God’s divine time schedule where *kairos* intersects *chronos*, the decisive moment has already come. Jesus has already appeared bringing salvation and healing to all who will accept Him “Today”!

This was the inspired Peter’s plea on that momentous Day of Pentecost: “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”⁹ Or as Paul put it: “Now He commands all people everywhere to repent. For He has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by this man He has appointed.”¹⁰

How true! The commission to the Christian church is to point people to that central *kairos* event already manifested: the sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. Accepting that ransom made for us means we enter *kairos* time here and now, already, and thus secure a better future.

A second point is to remind us why so many prophetic time schemes and prophecy charts based on chronological reckonings of the 1,260 days, the 2,520 days or even the three days and nights¹¹ break down. These schemes are rooted only in chronological time, whereas *kairos* time can be any time God chooses.

When the Ninevites repented, God intervened and changed the future. Once again *kairos* intersected with *chronos* just as it did for those 3,000 converts who heard Peter’s sermon.¹²

Yet you and I know of people who try to predetermine and preempt God’s sovereign freedom by choosing a date on a calendar when God *has* to intervene—maybe 1844 or 1917 or 1975 or 2000.

How futile to try to pin down our Sovereign God that way!

Third, Israel lived mainly in *chronos* time as evidenced by the sabbaths, festivals, set feasts and appointed times and seasons.¹³ The Hebrew calendar was lunar-solar, rooted to this world, this physical time and space system. But the gospel proclaims this thrilling truth—“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”¹⁴

The Christ-event changed everything. Radically. Christians celebrate their faith in *kairos* time regardless of the day of the week or a date on the calendar. This is the force of Acts 2:47, speaking of the early church: “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”

Step into eternity

Fourth, all authentic Christians live in two time zones—the temporal and the eternal. Eternity is one of those grand intangibles such as love and devotion, a can’t-see-it, can’t-touch-it concept that nevertheless looms large in the Christian life, especially as we near the end of our individual journeys.

“Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness,” Paul testified, “which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing.”¹⁵ Paul is speaking here of *kairos* time over *chronos* time, one reason Christians were not to know the day or hour of their Lord’s appearing.¹⁶

So, what time is it?

Time to call men and women to repentance, time for us all to turn more devotedly to God and accept that the center of history lies in the past in a *kairos* moment called Calvary. And by so doing we help affect eternity. □

¹ Psalm 90:12

² John 11:9

³ Mark 1:15,
2 Corinthians
1:20

⁴ Titus 1:1–3

⁵ Daniel 4:27

⁶ Acts 17:30

⁷ Hebrews 3:7–8

⁸ Hebrews 4:7

⁹ Acts 2:40

¹⁰ Acts 17:30–31

¹¹ Matthew 12:40

¹² Acts 2:41

¹³ Leviticus 23

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians
5:17

¹⁵ 2 Timothy 4:8

¹⁶ Acts 1:7

Moving mountains a

Have you ever wondered why Jesus said some of the things He said?

For example, Mark 11:22–24 suggests that if, in faith, we want to tell a mountain to throw itself into the sea, it can happen. However, why would I want to tell a mountain to throw itself into the sea? What would it accomplish other than making me feel more than a little powerful, creating a blot on the landscape, and upsetting conservationists? Did Jesus really mean that we should use faith whimsically, to accomplish whatever takes our fancy?

Sometimes I think Jesus used ideas for their shock value in order to get the attention of His listeners. Remember when He said that if your right hand offends you, you should cut it off? Or if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out? If these passages were to be taken literally, there would be a lot of one-eyed, one-handed Christians walking around. Christ was making a point through exaggeration. The point was that we should deal decisively with our sin before it takes over our life.

Jesus compared prayer to a child asking his father for something and believing that the father would respond. So great is our heavenly Father's desire to give to us that He knows the things we are in need of before we ask Him.¹

So what is Mark 11:22–24 all about? There is a context. There are powerful lessons to do with faith and prayer. The day before, Jesus, by His divine power, had caused a leafy but fruitless fig tree to wither. This was to teach His disciples that it is possible to seem spiritual and yet not produce the

by
**James R.
Henderson**

fruit God seeks from us. He had also cleansed the temple of those who exploited the house of prayer for personal profit.

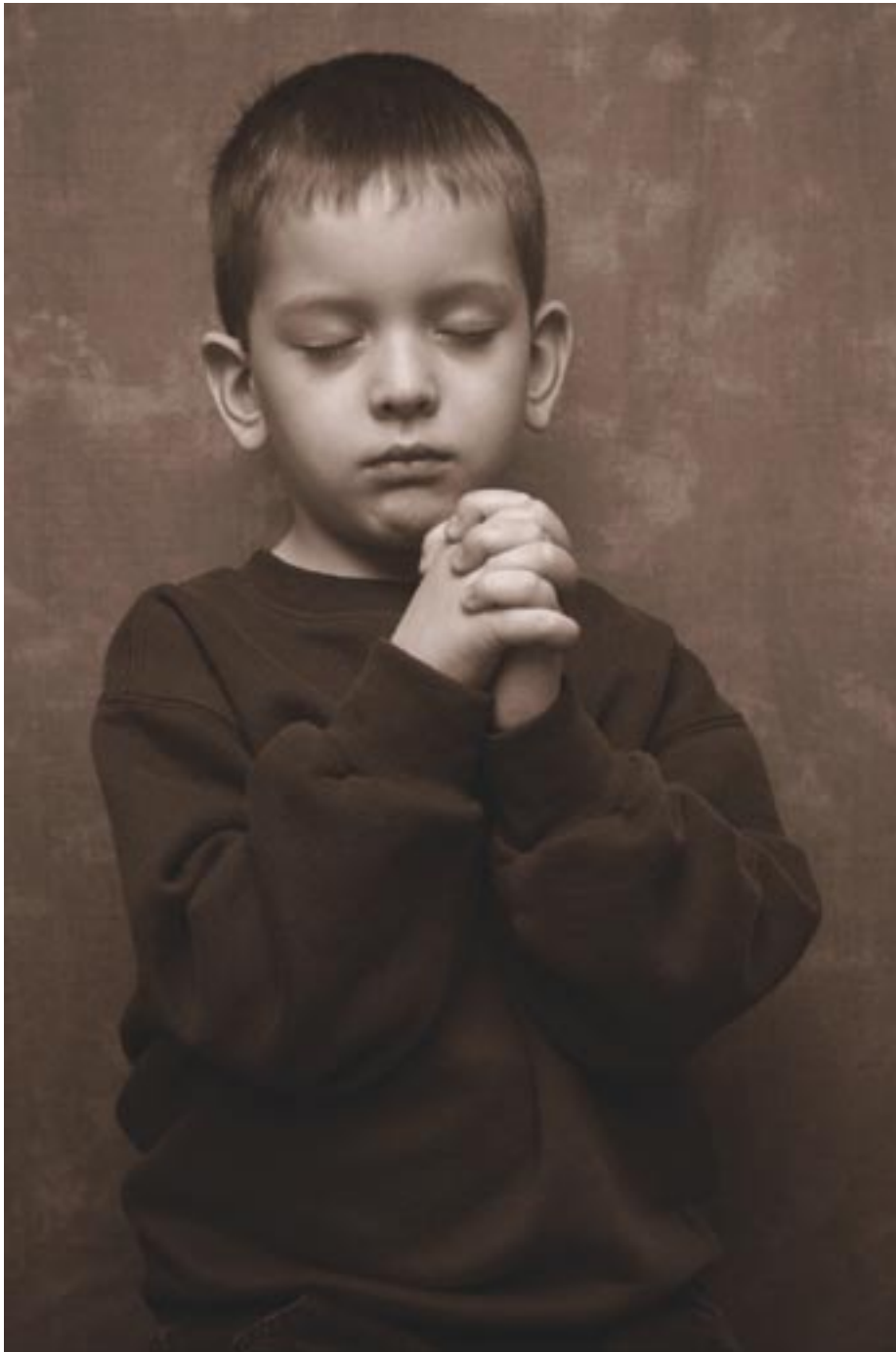
In remembering the fig tree, Jesus tells His followers to “have faith in God.” Was He saying to them that they too, if only they really believed, could curse fig trees? I

don't think so. Or was He stressing that the religious life without faith is of no use to God and that it may as well wither up and die?

The context also shows in verses 25 and 26 that prayer made without forgiving those who may have wronged us, just as we want God to forgive us, will not be heard and fulfilled. Therefore this passage explains that we don't automatically get everything we request in prayer—there are conditions of faith toward God, of bearing the fruit He requires of us, and of mercy shown to others.

It is not wise to let one passage of Scripture dictate the totality of doctrine on a particular subject. Mark 11:22–24 is one of many references with regard to praying in faith. A prayer of faith reaffirms God's sovereignty, not ours—that His will be done, not our own will.²

This touches on one of the problems with the “name it and claim it”



and cursing fig trees

prayer styles—the implication that faith gives us the ability to coerce God to give us what we demand. Such thinking implies wrongly that God’s sovereignty is subservient to ours.

Matthew 7:7–11 says that we can ask the Father, and He will give us “good things.” Does that mean that God gives us what is good for our long-term development, just as a parent gives a child what the parent thinks is best? If we desire something in

prayer that is not for our good, should God honour that request?

James, the brother of Jesus, exhorted Christians to “ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.”³ Don’t suppose, he says, that you will receive any answer from prayer if you are double-minded and uncommitted in your own request.

We need to be convinced about the value of prayer. The reference Jesus made with regard to believing we can move mountains affirms this. It is impossible to make an impression on God without faith that God is who He says He is, and also that He rewards those who seek Him diligently.⁴

A major problem that the readers of James’ epistle had was that they let their own selfish desires dominate their prayer life. “You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.”⁵



What did they want God to give them? Various ideas are suggested—success by the world’s standards⁶; God to be on their side and to win their battles for them⁷; their self-seeking positions to be realised⁸. Righteousness, argues James, is about faith. Faith is believing that God will do what He says He will do⁹. A life of faith involves making peace with others,¹⁰ not causing dissension by pushing our own cause or point of view. The effective prayer of the righteous person, which avails much, is a prayer for others, for those who are sick, for those in distress, not a prayer that is overcome by selfishness.¹¹

Faithful prayer does not always play out according to our plans. Prayer is about trusting God and leaving situations in His hands. It is about showing love by petitioning God on behalf of others.

Sometimes, when we pray, we present both the problem and our favourite solution to God, instead of leaving Him to choose an answer for us. Not that it is wrong

to think things through and offer ideas in prayer, but do we limit God’s answers in our mind to only what we think should happen? We need to open our minds to the infinite wonder of God—“to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.”¹²

We all need and value the intervention of God. In His sovereignty God can and does choose to supply what is good for us according to the abundance of His grace. He seeks to give us gifts and blessings. However, those blessings are not provided on demand. Jesus taught that prayer is more about what we can give than about what we can receive.

God is not a lucky charm or a winning lottery ticket. From the viewpoint of Jesus, prayer is a special relationship to be cherished, a relationship that brings us comfort and hope that the great God of the universe has taken a special interest in each of us. May He express through us that same interest toward others. □

¹ Matthew 6:8

² Matthew 6:10

³ James 1:3

⁴ Hebrews 11:6

⁵ James 4:3

⁶ James 4:4

⁷ James 4:1–2

⁸ James 3:14

⁹ James 2:23

¹⁰ James 3:18

¹¹ James 5:16

¹² Ephesians 3:20

Why the devil may care?

The Bible tell us that “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”¹ He dwells “in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power.”² We call God’s spiritual domain heaven, a place where the supreme power and authority of the universe is concentrated in unimaginable energy.

From the Bible we know there are other powerful beings in heaven known as angels. Most of them are benevolent, friendly and helpful. They often appear in the Bible record acting as agents or messenger for God or serving and protecting human beings. Although occasionally angels do manifest themselves in something resembling human form, they are not bound by physical limitations. They are created, eternal beings in the spirit world.

We cannot, as human beings, enter that world. We were created to live in a physical environment, dependent on air, food and water. However, the Bible tells us that it is God’s intention that mankind will eventually become immortal and enjoy eternal life in a spirit realm.

If we are to properly understand our relationship to God and the spirit world, we must understand God’s purpose for giving us physical life. If our concept of the overall purpose of life is vague or muddled, we are vulnerable to ideas and practices that can undermine the purpose. The astounding destiny of the human race is clearly revealed in the Bible, but it has been tragically misunderstood and misrepresented. Perhaps because the truth is so astounding, there are many false ideas and theories about the purpose and potential of human life. So let’s repeat this important point: Human beings were made with the capacity to become more than they are now. It is God’s intention that mankind eventually become immortal and enjoy eternal life.

Before He was crucified, Jesus

Christ told His followers that He was going to prepare a place for them. He added, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”³ If we look to Jesus Christ for guidance, and obey Him, He will lead us to our destiny in a sure, safe and certain way. That is the positive and encouraging news about the spirit world.

Unfortunately, not all that is in the spirit world is good, beneficent and helpful. There is a dark side. You cannot understand the spirit world without understanding the



role of Satan, the devil, ruler of the powers of darkness and leader of the forces of spiritual evil.

Although most people have some form of belief in God, many find it much harder to believe that there is a devil. That is exactly what the devil wants. If he can be thought of as a figment of our imagination, a bygone fantasy of medieval superstition, he has the perfect disguise to perform his role of adversary of God and enemy of mankind.

The Bible reveals that Satan was once a powerful angel called Lucifer—the light bringer. He became perverted, wrapped up in his own power and beauty. In an outburst of envy and jealousy, he led one third of the angels in rebellion against the authority of God. The rebellion was repulsed, and Lucifer became Satan (“the Adversary”) and his angelic

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God.**

cohorts became demons.⁴

Satan remains to this day in opposition to everything God stands for. He knows what God’s plan is, and is intent on subverting and thwarting it. Jesus instructed us to pray to God to “deliver us from the evil one.”⁵ He knows that Satan holds a special hatred towards the human race, made in God’s image, and committed to its destruction. The devil’s strategy is to appear as a benefactor and friend of mankind. As the apostle Paul warned: “...For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.”⁶ Satan and the demons would like to be our spiritual guides. They know that few of us would choose them voluntarily, but we can be deceived, when we are tempted by curiosity or ignorance, to seek the spiritual in the wrong way. However, the apostle Paul told us that we need not be “ignorant of his devices.”⁷

His first “device” was to persuade Adam and Eve into disobeying God. From that day onwards, he has not ceased to look for opportunities to deceive and confuse their descendants.

Many of Satan’s strategies may seem like harmless fun. Some provide a thrill, a spiritual “high” or even temporary relief from stress. They will lead you inexorably into a web of evil that will destroy you. That, of course, is Satan’s ultimate goal—for you and every human being.

Anyone therefore who seeks help from the spirit world must understand that there is an evil and deceitful enemy waiting to lead the unwary astray.

Do you think we are overstating the case? The Bible warns us with good reason to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.”⁸

Satan is wily, cunning and deceitful. He works deceitfully, quietly and insidiously. He knows how to arouse our curiosity, and he can play on our insecurities and fears. □

¹ John 4:24

² 1 Timothy 6:16

³ John 14:3

⁴ Luke 10:18,
Revelation 12:4

⁵ Mathew 6:13

⁶ 2 Corinthians
11:14

⁷ 2 Corinthians
2:11

⁸ Ephesians 5:11



Learn to enjoy the little things—there are so many of them.
Author Unknown

I hear and I forget.
I see and I remember,
I do and I understand.
Chinese Proverb

Friendship is like money, easier made than kept.
Samuel Butler
English writer

Doctrines, credos, manifestos, laws, declarations, codes of ethics. Ever since people have been able to communicate, they have compiled words to communicate, they have compiled words to live by. But the world is still troubled. Take these words: honesty, workmanship, ambition, faith, education, charity, responsibility, courage. Chances are four and a half billion people won't agree to live by them. But think how much better your life would be if just one person does.
An Advertisement
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Love calls for open arms. With arms open you allow love to come and go as it wills, freely, for it will do so anyway. If you close your arms about love you'll find you are left only holding yourself.
Leo Buscaglia
American educator/writer

Someone has to give way. There is a rule in sailing that the more maneuverable ship should give way to the less maneuverable craft. I think this is sometimes a good rule to follow in human relationships as well.
Dr. Joyce Brothers
American psychologist

Challenges make you discover things about yourself that you never really knew. They're what make the instrument stretch—what make you go beyond the norm.
Cicely Tyson
American film star

It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look... To affect the quality of the day—that is the highest of arts.
Henry Thoreau
American writer

People's minds are changed through observation and not through argument.
Will Rogers
American humorist

The most delightful surprise in life is to suddenly recognize your own worth.
Maxwell Maltz
U.S. surgeon/author

Failure is success if we learn from it.
Malcolm Forbes
American publisher

Anonymous Sayings:

The archer strikes the target, partly by pulling, partly by letting go.

Aim for service, not success, and success will follow.

Backbone beats wishbone every time.

The world has a lot of starters but very few finishers.

We are all self-made, but only the rich will admit it.

Mondays are the potholes in the road of life.

One ailment that antibiotics will never stamp out is premature formation of opinion.

Genius has limits; stupidity does not.

Experience is the hardest kind of teacher. It gives you the test first and the lesson afterward.

A lie may take care of the present, but it has no future.

If you think you are too small to do big things, try doing small things in a big way.

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.

A human experi

In the pharmaceutical industry, it takes as many as 10 years to research, experiment and produce a drug and its cost can run into hundreds of millions of dollars. The drug goes through extensive testing—first on animals and then on terminally-ill patients—before it is distributed to the pharmacies. Even then the results are not always conclusive. But the terminally ill are willing to try it because the alternative may mean death.

This article is not about drugs for curing ailments like cancer, diabetes or AIDS. It is about a human experiment conducted to discover the meaning and purpose of life and the source of true happiness.

The findings of this experiment are very significant and you need to know them so that you can avoid the frustration of pursuing wrong goals, and start to pursue those which produce true happiness.

The experiment

The objective of the experiment was to discover the real meaning and purpose of life and the source of true happiness. The experiment was conducted in Jerusalem over a period of about 20 years beginning around 950 B.C. It was conducted by a king of great renown, wisdom, wealth and power—King Solomon.

The experiment essentially covered four areas of life—seeking happiness through work, wealth, pleasure, power and fame—the very things that we human beings seek today.

Work

King Solomon sought to discover the meaning and purpose of life through his work. So he undertook all sorts of projects such as constructing cities, buildings, parks and reservoirs, and planting gardens, orchards and vineyards.¹ He undertook these projects with great passion. He was personally involved in the initial plan, supervision and execution. After all, there was no one

who could match his intelligence.

Although he enjoyed his work and found great pleasure in it, it didn't satisfy his soul.² There was something missing in his life and he couldn't figure it out.

Wealth

Like many people today, Solomon sought happiness through wealth. So he worked very hard and accumulated great wealth—real estate, livestock, gold and silver. He owned scores of slaves who helped him multiply his wealth. He became the richest king in the region.³



by
**Dr. P.
Sellappan**

Pleasure

Solomon tried to seek happiness through his senses. So he indulged himself in all sorts of sensual pleasures. He did not deny himself of any pleasure. He wine and dined to his heart's content. He called his troupe to entertain him with all sorts of dances, music and songs. He also indulged in sex. He married 700 wives and acquired another 300 concubines (including many foreign women).

All these titillated his senses for a while but they didn't bring lasting happiness. His soul was still longing for something.

Power and fame

Solomon became king of Israel at a very young age. He became a powerful king and reigned for 40 years. His kingdom had peace on every side.

Besides riches, Solomon possessed intellectual power. He wrote hundreds of proverbs and songs (some of which are still in use today). He was a brilliant scientist, judge, philosopher and preacher. His knowledge and wisdom surpassed everyone.⁴

Solomon was a renowned king. Dignitaries from distant lands came to see his glorious kingdom—all the projects that he undertook and all his accomplishments. They also came to test his wisdom and they were very impressed!

All his power and fame however did not satisfy his soul or make him happy.⁵

The findings

Although King Solomon was very successful, there was something terribly missing in his life that drove him to despair and frustration. What was he trying to accomplish—running here and there, doing this and that, meeting this person and that person? He was very frustrated with his life but he couldn't explain or figure out why—even with all



All his wealth however did not satisfy his soul. There was something missing in his life. He even feared that somebody foolish might inherit his wealth and squander it.

ment gone awry

his earthly wisdom. Psychologists today would label his condition as depression. Exasperated, he sighed, “Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”⁶ That was the stark conclusion he reached at the end of his experiment.

King Solomon tried everything there was to try—work, pleasure, sex, money, power and fame—the very things that we humans pursue so zealously today. But at the end of it all he hated his life.⁷

We would all be smarter not to repeat that experiment. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. He has already done it for us and the findings are available for free.

The missing dimension

What about you? In all your pursuits, do you also experience the same kind of frustration that afflicted King Solomon—a feeling of despair, futility and hopelessness? Many do even though they may not admit it! If you are one of them, there is good news for you.

What is that missing ‘something’? It is given in the book of Ecclesiastes, chapter 3, verse 11. It reads, “You can find that He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also *set eternity in the hearts of men*; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.”

That missing something is *eternal life*. God made us to have an eternal relationship with him. He wants us to be filled with His love, His peace, His joy and His happiness. That is His divine purpose for us. That is the mystery that had been hidden for ages. Jesus Christ came to reveal it to His followers. The Plain Truth proclaims it in simple, plain language so that everyone can have access to this eternal life (symbolized by the Tree of Life in the book of Genesis, chapter 2, verse 9).

Another route

King Solomon started well but his foreign wives turned his heart away from following the Lord. He departed from the Lord and plunged his nation into idolatry.⁸ He was busy with all his pursuits that he forgot God’s purpose for him. So he became disillusioned with his life. At the end of his life, he admitted failure and advised his subjects (and us today) not to follow that route. His advice was: “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”⁹

So if your life has *short-changed* you, don’t despair! We have good news for you. Try another route—try Jesus Christ. Jesus claims that He is the way, the truth, and the life and whoever believes and follows Him will have eternal life in His kingdom.¹⁰

Only Jesus can satisfy your spiritual hunger and thirst. Only He can fill the void in your life. The good news is He loves you deeply and is calling you to a new life empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can transform your life so that you can experience true joy and happiness. Why not open your heart to Him? He promises to fill you with His love, His joy, His peace and His happiness.

Of this new life, the prophet Isaiah writes, “Hey there! All who are thirsty, come to the water! Are you penniless? Come anyway—buy and eat! Come, buy your drinks, buy wine and milk. Buy without money—everything’s free! Why do you spend your money on junk food, your hard-earned cash on cotton candy? Listen to me, listen well: Eat only the best, fill yourself with only the finest. Pay attention, come close now, listen carefully to my life-giving, life-nourishing words. I’m making a lasting covenant commitment with you, the same that I made with David: sure, solid, enduring love.”¹¹

The above description is of course symbolic. Just as physical

food satisfies our physical hunger and thirst, God is offering us his Holy Spirit to quench our spiritual hunger and thirst.

Of this new life, the apostle John also writes, “On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.”¹²

Conclusion

The findings of King Solomon are conclusive. They have been proven again and again by millions of people through all generations. They are valid today just as they were valid then. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. We will be smarter by not repeating the experiment.

There is a God-shaped hole (void) in every human being. No amount of work, money, pleasure, fame or power can fill this void. Only God through his Holy Spirit can fill it.

Jesus Christ who is infinitely greater in power, wisdom, riches and glory than King Solomon¹³ is offering you this new life empowered by the Holy Spirit. He promises to satisfy your deepest spiritual hunger and thirst and fill you with His love, His joy, and His peace. The father of Solomon, King David, sums it up thus: “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.”¹⁴

When Jesus was here on the earth, Satan tempted him by offering Him similar things—power, fame, glory and riches. He enticed him with physical things, but Jesus rejected his offer.¹⁵ He focused on doing His Father’s will so that we might have eternal life in His kingdom. You and I have a choice to make. What will that be? ☐

¹ 1 Kings 9, Ecclesiastes 2
² Ecclesiastes 2:11
³ Ecclesiastes 2: 4–9
⁴ 1 Kings 4:29–34
⁵ Ecclesiastes 2: 12–16
⁶ Ecclesiastes 1:2
⁷ Ecclesiastes 2:17
⁸ 1 Kings 11:110
⁹ Ecclesiastes 12:13
¹⁰ John 11:25–26; 14:6
¹¹ Isaiah 55:1–3 (Message Bible)
¹² John 7:37–39
¹³ Luke 11:31
¹⁴ Psalms 16:11
¹⁵ Matthew 4:1–11

Salvation: Past,

Sometimes Christians ask the question “Have you *been* saved?” At the same time scripture speaks of Christians *being* saved. And we often speak of salvation as something that will happen to us *in the future*. Is this confusing? Have we already been saved, are we being saved now, or are we yet to be saved? This question confused me for a while, until someone said, “Justification, sanctification, glorification—past, present, and future.”

Salvation is a process that began in the past, continues in the present, and will not be completely fulfilled until later. Justification, sanctification, and glorification may be big words, but they are scriptural, and they do sum up God’s plan of salvation.

Justification—Salvation in the past

There is a church building in Germany adorned with a carving of a lamb. When this church was being built, one of the workers fell off of a scaffold from a height that would normally be fatal. But it happened that a herd of sheep was passing by on the road below. The man landed on a lamb, breaking his fall. He suffered only minor injuries, but the lamb was killed. The workers saw some very meaningful symbolism in that event—Jesus, the Lamb of God gave His life to save our lives. All of us were in a fatal fall until the Lamb of God put Himself in our place, breaking our fall and Himself dying in order to save our lives. That’s the meaning of justification.

The event that makes justification possible occurred in the past. Jesus’ sacrifice occurred almost 2,000 years ago, and actually it was part of God’s plan long before that. Revelation 13:8 tells us that Jesus was “slain from the creation of the world.”

by
Paul Hailey

sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are *justified* freely by His grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

What is our part in justification? Simply believe in and accept the priceless gift of salvation. Acts 10:43 puts it this way: “All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name.” Implied in this verse is the fact that we must see ourselves as sinners and in need of being saved from the penalty of sin, which is death. Also, as other scriptures explain, this belief is more than wishful thinking, but rather a faith or confidence that Jesus truly is the Saviour of the world. We are justified by faith, and even that faith is a gift from God.

If you do not yet have that faith, or if you do not have much faith, ask Him for the faith that leads to salvation.

Sanctification—Salvation in the present

Justification is instantaneous, and is a one-time-only event. We are justified the moment we first have faith in Christ. But we realise that even after accepting Christ as our Saviour, we are far from perfect. When Martin Luther spoke of the Christian state he used the phrase “at the same time righteous and sinner.” We are righteous in a legal sense, but we still fall short in many ways.

That’s where sanctification begins, and continues as God



It is through Christ’s self-sacrifice that we are declared righteous in a legal sense, and brought into a right relationship with God. As Romans 3:23–24 says, “for all have

present, future

works in us, changing us, improving our motives, thoughts, and character. We might ask, “How does God change us?” First of all, He gives us a measure of the Holy Spirit that instills in our minds a tiny portion of the character of God. This in turn results in Godly qualities being instilled in our lives. Galatians 5:22 tells us the results of the Holy Spirit working inside of us—“but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” As we nurture the promptings of the Holy Spirit we grow in Godly character. “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”¹

God also sanctifies us through His word, the Bible. Jesus spoke these words when praying for His disciples, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.”² God’s will is expressed throughout scripture, and especially in the life and words of Jesus. When we study scripture, letting the Words of God sink into our minds, those words mold and shape (sanctify) our innermost being.

Prayer is vital to our sanctification. Prayer is nothing more than talking to God, praising Him, thanking Him, humbling ourselves before Him, and letting our requests be made known. In talking to Him, we draw closer to Him and He draws closer to us. “Come near to God and He will come near to you.”³

The church is part of God’s sanctification process. When Christians gather together we hear the Word of God explained. We also see that we are not alone in our Christian walk, and we can share experiences, pray for each other and encourage each other. Fellowship with other Christians is vital in bringing us to spiritual maturity.

God also sanctifies us, or changes us for the better through circumstances, some pleasant and

some difficult. We learn love by being loved. We learn patience by having our patience tried. We learn forgiveness by being mistreated ourselves. We learn compassion by suffering ourselves. We learn wisdom by working through bewildering situations. A Chinese proverb says, “The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials.”

It is reassuring to know that, whether we realise it or not, the Lord is intimately involved in sanctifying each one of us. Christ does not leave us to our own devices. He is with us. As David said in the 23rd Psalm, “The Lord is my shepherd... He leads me in the paths of righteousness.”

What then is our role in sanctification? True enough, God does the work.

But the Apostle Paul wrote, “Grow in the grace and knowledge”, implying that we have a part in the sanctification process. Like getting a haircut, we must go to the barber and let him clip away the unwanted hair. We must put ourselves in God’s hands, filling our minds with the things of God, and yielding to His will by letting Him clip away bad points in our character.

Glorification—Salvation in the future

Scripture promises that when Jesus returns, we will receive an immortal, glorified body—“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.”⁴ Some day we will be resurrected and glorified—“in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”⁵

What is our role in glorification? Well, obviously, we can’t glorify ourselves. We just grow old and die. God will do the transforming.

But until that time, Jesus does tell us to wait, and to keep serving Him: “So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in His household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when He returns.”⁶

Summary

You probably wouldn’t remember the formal definitions of “justification”, “sanctification”, and “glorification”. I wouldn’t either. It helps me to remember concepts like these if I put them in my own words. If you are this type of person, you might simply say that justification means “Jesus died to pay for our sins, making us clean and innocent in God’s eyes.” To remember the meaning of “sanctification” you could say “God, through the Holy Spirit, is cleaning us up from the inside out.” You might explain “glorification” by saying “at Christ’s return we will be changed, made immortal, and forever be with the Lord.”

Salvation begins with our recognising who Jesus was, who He is, and accepting Him as our Lord and Saviour. Once we do that we can be confident that He will carry us through all the way to our place in immortality as explained in Philippians 1:6—“being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” and I Thessalonians 5: 23, 24—“May God Himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it.” □

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:11

² John 17:17

³ James 4:8

⁴ 1 John 3:2

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:52

⁶ Matthew 22: 44–46

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