

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Sep-Nov 2010

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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Secular vs. spiritual work

Some Christians view certain jobs as spiritual and others secular. For example, they view preaching, doing missions and hospital and prison ministries as spiritual whereas doing household chores, taking care of children, fixing broken pipes, farming and collecting garbage as secular.

Does God classify work into spiritual and secular? Does He bless those who do spiritual work more than those who do secular work? Does He discriminate? This article is about how God views work.

All jobs (except the 'immoral' types) are important. We need the clergy to teach God's word and provide spiritual guidance. And we need housewives to take care of children and household chores, garbage collectors to dispose garbage, plumbers to fix pipes, accountants to do accounts, engineers to build roads and bridges, teachers to educate children and farmers to produce crops. Without them, our homes will stink, our children will be illiterate and we will have no food to eat. They contribute to our well-being in one way or another. Life will be difficult without their services. So all jobs are important and we need to do them as best as we can with the abilities and talents God has given us.

Wise King Solomon wrote: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom."¹

St. Paul concurred: "... whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."²

We don't live in isolation. There is no Robinson Crusoe except in children's story books. We live as a connected community. If pilots stop flying planes because of volcanic ash in Europe, farmers in Kenya will suffer as their livelihood depends on exporting their roses to UK. If engineers in the Gulf don't stop the oil spill, the local fishermen and the hotel and tour operators will suffer, not to mention the damage to the environment and marine life. Every job is important.

The Bible likens the human community to a body with many parts (head, ear, eye, nose, hand, toe, etc.) each performing a unique function. Every part is important and each part must perform its work effectively if the whole body is to function well. If one

by
**Dr. P.
Sellappan**

part suffers, the whole body suffers.

God has endowed the human race with many different talents and abilities to do various tasks.³ All tasks are *equally* important. Preaching, doing mission and ministry are important, and so are caring for children, doing household chores, fixing pipes, doing accounts, treating patients, collecting garbage and growing crops. So we must work as best as we can with the abilities and talents God has given us. Every able-bodied person must work and contribute to the well-being of the rest of the community. That's how God views work and that is how we must view work.

Society views certain jobs as more important than others and it even pays huge salaries for those who do 'important' jobs and a pittance for those who do 'less important' jobs. Such discrimination and inequality often leads to social unrest in some nations.



Scripture tells us that in Christ all jobs are *equally* important and valued.

St. Paul wrote: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."⁴ He repeated it: "...there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all."⁵

There is no such thing as 'secular' work and 'spiritual' work, 'important' and 'less important' work. All work is spiritual. Pastors who preach minister to their

congregations, mothers who take care of their children minister to them, farmers who provide food serve the community. God tells us to do our jobs as unto the Lord⁶ and do them willingly and cheerfully. And He will bless us abundantly.

God is a community. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit have different functions, but they work as one being. Their life (and work) is one of unity and harmony. They live by giving themselves to one another in self-giving love. This is the kind of life that produces peace, joy, passion, fun and intimacy. God gives the Holy Spirit to help us participate in His shared life. It's free, but you must ask for it. It will radically transform your perspective of life and work. Why not ask for it today? □

¹ Ecclesiastes 9:10

² Colossians 3:17

³ Romans 12, 1

Corinthians 12

⁴ Galatians 3:28

⁵ Colossians 3:11

⁶ Colossians 3:23

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 From eternity God planned to create and include humanity in His life.

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What our readers say:

The articles are very stimulating, enlightening, informative, encouraging and refreshing. In fact, I have found some of your articles mind-stretching and thought-provoking. Yes, I find them very useful—not only for my reading but I am also using some of your articles for references and discussion during my cell meetings! I have been enjoying all your articles for the past many years and I am simply impressed and delighted with them. Please continue sending me your magazine and I thank you from the bottom of my heart. May God bless every one of you who is doing this wonderful work so that many lives will be touched and blessed by your ministry! Praise the Lord.

Helen Seah
Singapore

The articles are very edifying, thought-provoking, inspiring and help me to have a deeper understanding of God's character and will. They give different perspectives on many issues. I enjoy reading THE PLAIN TRUTH.

Eric Mong
Singapore

The articles are generally informative and thought-provoking. The magazine is quite unique. Remember one thing though. Don't ever forget. There are many paths that lead to God. Don't be hasty in making judgment.

Giram
Singapore

Ed.: Thank you for your comment. No, we don't judge anyone. We simply tell the Good News that in Jesus Christ all mankind are forgiven, reconciled, accepted and adopted as His beloved children, and invited to share life with God.

THE PLAIN TRUTH gives me spiritual guidance and understanding and I enjoy reading it. Please send me the magazine. Enclosed please find a cheque for RM50, being a small love offering and appreciation for your lovely gift. Thank you and God bless you all.

Suzanne Goh Say Heng
Puchong

THE PLAIN TRUTH provides spiritual knowledge to a lay person like me. Enclosed herewith is a cheque for RM50.00

as my contribution towards the publication of the magazine.

Daniel Balan
Sungei Petani

Ed.: Thank you for your contribution. It sure helps to defray the cost of printing and mailing each copy. By the way, effective this issue, the postage cost has increased from 50 cents to 80 cents or by 60% (within Malaysia).

Being actively involved with the Youth Ministry in our church, I find the magazine extremely helpful. My mother who is a teacher also reads it and finds it enlightening and passes it to other co-workers in her school and church. It is an indispensable tool and I hope to continue receiving it. Thank you.

Jude A Lopez
Kota Kinabalu

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me know who God is, who I am, and the purpose of this life.

James B Marag
Kota Belud

The articles are interesting, well-written in simple and readable style, and appealing to the ordinary reader. Thank you very much. I look forward to receiving more.

Anthony F Chan
Penang

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me to discover my true self and the purpose of my being on this planet earth. It also helps me in my walk with God through Jesus' teachings.

David Liew
Petaling Jaya

THE PLAIN TRUTH is simply great. It is priceless and precious. Many thanks.

Ruth Cinyee Yeo
Singapore

Thank you for another great issue (Apr-Jun 2010). The cover story "With what bodies are the dead raised?" by Paul Kroll is very informative. The article "Who is the Holy Spirit?" by Roy Lawrence gives a good explanation of the work of the Holy Spirit. Mak Chew Yeng's article "To be loved" is superb as it expresses God's love for us in spite of all our failings and weaknesses. "Drawing first blood" by Nan Kuhlman is very moving—it tells how God

cares for us by working through other selfless people. The "spiritual makeover" clarifies how we are made holy and righteous. Keep up the good work!

Jaya
Petaling Jaya

I enjoy reading THE PLAIN TRUTH because it is simple and easy to understand. It helps me to go deeper into God's word while preparing messages to share during prayer meetings in the cell group. The articles are relevant to today's living. I would like to continue receiving this magazine.

Michael Martin
Nibong Tebal

THE PLAIN TRUTH is very informative. The quotations make me think and help me to live a more fulfilling life. You see I had a surgery and I am still in severe pain. I am a surgeon myself. And I am also going through a divorce. I need all the help, but I am strong in the Lord.

Name withheld

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. Donations should be sent to the addresses listed on page 2 or sent electronically to the bank account:

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The editor reserves the right to use letters so addressed in whole or in part, and to include your name and edit the letter for clarity and space.

We are always in His mind

The doctrine of the Trinity has been with us for more than 1,600 years. Most Christians consider it to be one of the “givens” of their faith, and don’t give it much thought. Theologian J.I. Packer noted that the Trinity is usually considered a little-thought-about piece of “theological lumber” that no one pays much attention to.

But whatever your level of understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity, one thing you can know for sure: The Triune God is unchangeably committed to including you in the wonderful fellowship of the life of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.

Communion

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that there are not three Gods, only one, and that God, the only true God, the God of the Bible, is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This has always been a concept that is difficult to put into words. But let’s try. The Father, Son and Spirit, we might say, mutually indwell one another, that is, the life they share is perfectly interpenetrating. In other words, there is no such thing as the Father apart from the Son and the Spirit. There is no such thing as the Son apart from the Father and the Spirit. And there is no Holy Spirit apart from the Father and the Son.

That means that when you are in Christ, you are included in the fellowship and joy of the life of the Triune God. It means the Father receives you and has fellowship with you as He does with Jesus. It means that the love that God once and for all demonstrated in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is no less than the love the Father has always had for you even before you were a believer and always will have for you.

It means that God has declared in Christ that you belong to Him, that you are included, that you matter. That’s why the Christian life is all about love, God’s love for you and God’s love in you.

God did not make us to be alone. To be created in God’s image, as the Bible says humanity is,¹ is to be created for loving relationships, for communion with God and with one another. The late systematic theologian Colin Gunton put it this way: “God is already ‘in advance’ of creation, a communion of persons existing in loving relations.”

Mutual indwelling

This union/communion of Father, Son and Spirit was referred to as *perichoresis* by the early Greek fathers of the church. They used the word in the sense of *mutual*



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**

“Salvation flows from God’s absolute love for and faithfulness to humanity, not from a desperate attempt to repair the damages of sin. God’s gracious purpose for humanity existed before sin ever entered the picture.”

indwelling.

Why does this matter? Because it is that very inner life of love in the Triune God that God shares with *us* in Jesus Christ.

Theologian Michael Jinkins describes it this way: “Through the self-giving of Jesus Christ, through God’s self-emptying assumption of our humanity, God shares God’s own inner life and being in communion with us, uniting us to Himself by the Word through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the God who is Love brings us into a real participation in the eternal life of God.”

Too “theological” sounding? Let’s make it simpler. Just as Paul told the pagans at Athens, in God we all “live and move and have our being”.² The God in whom we live and move and have our being is the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, each existing in the other in perfect communion and love. The Son became human

so that we humans can join Him in that perfect communion of love that He shares with the Father and the Spirit. All this we learn from God’s own perfect revelation of Himself in Jesus Christ attested in the Scriptures.

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really knew Me, you would know My Father as well.”³

“Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in Me?...Believe Me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.”⁴

“On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you.”⁵

“I pray also for those who will believe in Me through your message, that all of them may be one, Father,

just as you are in Me and I am in you.”⁶

“For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him [Jesus Christ], and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.”⁷

Salvation flows from God’s absolute love for and faithfulness to humanity, not from a desperate attempt to repair the damages of sin. God’s gracious purpose for humanity existed *before* sin ever entered the picture.⁸ God has assured our future—He has, as Jesus said, “been pleased to give you the kingdom.”⁹ Jesus has taken us with Him where He is.¹⁰

God has purposed to never be without us. *All* of us, for “God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by

making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.”¹¹
We often forget that. But God never does.

In His embrace

In Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit by the will of the Father, we mortal, sinning human beings, in spite of ourselves, are graciously and lovingly held in the divine embrace of the triune God. That is exactly what the Father intended for us from the beginning. “In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.”¹²

Redemption starts with God’s nature, His absolute and unquenchable love for humanity, not with human sin. Through the Incarnation of the Son, His becoming one of us and making us one with Him, God includes us humans in the all-embracing love of the Father for the Son and the Son for the Father. God made us for this very reason—so that in Christ we can be His beloved children.

This has been God’s will for us from before creation. “For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will—to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves... And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ... to bring all things in heaven and earth together under one head, even Christ.”¹³

Through the atoning Incarnation of the Son, Jesus Christ, humans are already forgiven, reconciled and saved in Him. Divine amnesty has been proclaimed for all humanity in Christ. The sin that entered the human experience through Adam cannot hold a candle to the overwhelming flood of God’s grace through Jesus Christ. “Consequently,” the apostle Paul wrote, “just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men.”¹⁴

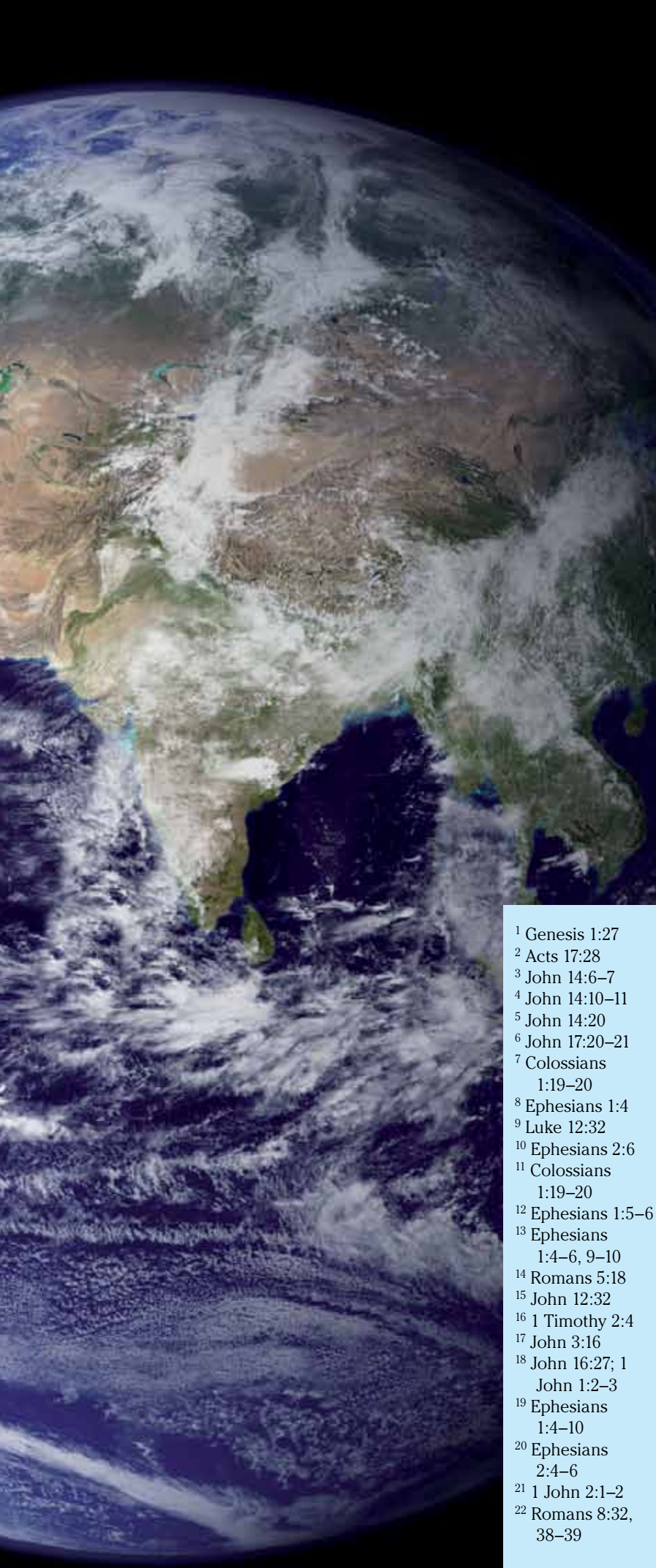
Universal salvation?

So will everyone automatically—perhaps even against their will, enter into the joy of knowing and loving God? Such a thing is actually an oxymoron. That is, it is impossible for you to love someone against your will. God draws all humanity to Himself,¹⁵ but He does not force anyone to come. God wants everyone to come to faith,¹⁶ but He does not force anyone. God loves every person,¹⁷ but He doesn’t force anyone to love Him—love has to be voluntary, freely given, or it is not love.

Contrary to the idea of universal salvation, only those who trust Jesus are able to love Him and experience the joy of His salvation. Those who don’t trust Him, who refuse His forgiveness or the salvation He has already won for them, whether because they don’t want it or simply because they don’t care, can’t love Him and enjoy fellowship with Him. For those who consider God their enemy, God’s constant love for them is a grossly aggravating intrusion. The more they are confronted with His love, the more they hate Him. For those who hate God, life in God’s world is hell.

As C.S. Lewis put it, “The damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside.” Or as Robert Capon explained:





“There is no sin you can commit that God in Jesus hasn’t forgiven already. The only way you can get yourself into permanent Dutch [trouble] is to refuse forgiveness. *That’s hell.*”

Always on His mind

The doctrine of the Trinity is far more than just a creed to be recited or words printed on a statement of faith. The central biblical truth that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit actually shapes our faith and our lives as Christians. The wonderful and beautiful fellowship shared by the Father, Son, and Spirit is the very fellowship of love into which our Saviour Jesus places us through His life, death, resurrection and ascension as God in the flesh.¹⁸

From before all time the Triune God determined to bring humanity into the indescribable life and fellowship and joy that Father, Son and Holy Spirit share together as the one true God.¹⁹ In Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, we have been made right with the Father, and in Jesus we are included in the fellowship and joy of the shared life of the Trinity.²⁰ The church is made up of those who have already come to faith in Christ. But redemption applies to all.²¹ The gap has been bridged. The price has been paid. The way is open for the human race—like the prodigal son in the parable—to come home.

Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension are proof of the total and unwavering devotion of the Father to His loving purpose of including humanity in the joy and fellowship of the life of the Trinity. Jesus is the proof that the Father will never abandon us. In Jesus, the Father has adopted us and made us His beloved children, and He will never forsake His plans for us.

When we trust Jesus to be our all in all, it is not an empty trust. He *is* our all in all. In Him, our sins are forgiven, our hearts are made new, and we are included in the life He shares with the Father and the Spirit.

Salvation is the direct result of the Father’s ever-faithful love and power, proven incontrovertibly through Jesus Christ and ministered to us by the Holy Spirit. It’s not our faith that saves us. It’s God alone—Father, Son and Spirit—who saves us. And God gives us faith as a gift to open our eyes to the truth of who He is—and who we are, as His beloved children.

God’s eternal and almighty word of love and inclusion for you will never be silenced.²² You belong to Him, and nothing in heaven or earth can ever change that. □

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¹ Genesis 1:27

² Acts 17:28

³ John 14:6–7

⁴ John 14:10–11

⁵ John 14:20

⁶ John 17:20–21

⁷ Colossians
1:19–20

⁸ Ephesians 1:4

⁹ Luke 12:32

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:6

¹¹ Colossians
1:19–20

¹² Ephesians 1:5–6

¹³ Ephesians
1:4–6, 9–10

¹⁴ Romans 5:18

¹⁵ John 12:32

¹⁶ 1 Timothy 2:4

¹⁷ John 3:16

¹⁸ John 16:27; 1
John 1:2–3

¹⁹ Ephesians
1:4–10

²⁰ Ephesians
2:4–6

²¹ 1 John 2:1–2

²² Romans 8:32,
38–39

Let's give Him our best... and our worst

Clearly, God desires that we give Him our best. As the Apostle Paul wrote, we are to be “living sacrifices”, dedicating our lives to Him.¹ After all, we owe Him our existence and the eternal salvation that He promises. It is simply fitting that we give Him our very best.

Giving Him our best

What is our “best” anyway, and how do we flawed human beings give Him our best? We might think, as I sometimes used to, it would be doing exploits like those heroes described in Hebrews chapter 11, the “faith chapter”. This chapter mentions Moses, who led the nation of Israel out of Egyptian captivity through dramatic miracles. It also tells of Peter, an uneducated fisherman who became the influential leader of the



by
Paul Hailey

our fellow man through everyday acts of kindness, such as remaining patient in difficult situations, overlooking wrongs, speaking well of others, and serving others even in simple ways. God even notices when we give a glass of water to a thirsty person.

Mother Teresa, who won the Nobel Prize in Peace in 1979 for her untiring service to extremely poor people in Calcutta, India, summed it up well when she said, “We can do no great things; only small things with great love.” Opportunities to show love to others come our way frequently. Let's ask Him to make us aware of them so we don't let them pass by!

Giving Him our worst

Give Him our *worst*? That probably sounds irreverent! But let me explain. To be realistic again, you and I do



early New Testament church. There was Noah, who laboured for decades to build a life-saving ark. Others became mighty prophets, preaching powerfully and fearlessly.

Wait a minute! Let's be realistic! I certainly don't do notable exploits. You probably don't either. After all, as the Apostle Paul said, most of us are not the mighty or wise of the world.² We tend to be plain, ordinary people. So we might ask, what can *we* ordinary people do to give God our “best”?

Thank God, the answer is simple. God's greatest and best gift to us is His love. We give Him our best when we return love to Him and to others. We return His love by appreciating, honouring and obeying Him.

1 Corinthians chapter 13 tells us we can show love to

not behave our best all the time. We fall short in loving others, yielding to sour attitudes such as impatience, anger, and frustration. We also become wearied by the troubles of everyday life. God knows this and He has provided relief for our burdens and shortcomings. Jesus invites His followers to give Him all of our cares, worries, fears, doubts and frustrations. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”³ The Apostle Peter thought that was good advice when he said, “Cast *all* your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”⁴

Jesus *is* emotionally touched by our cares—not that He actually experienced everything we may experience. Obviously He was never in an automobile accident. Perhaps none of His relatives died of

diabetes. However, He suffered enough to relate to all of our troubles compassionately, regardless of the details. What a privilege it is to hand over our cares to the One who can ease our physical and emotional burdens!

As Christians we are also privileged to be able to give Him our sins, even our very worst. “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin (*we all do*), we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”⁵ When Jesus went to the cross He carried with Him the past, present and future sins of *all* humanity.⁶ In theological terms, He *justified* us, declaring us righteous because His perfect righteousness is lovingly transferred to us.

Giving Him our sins requires that we confess them, and that is not easy. It is uncomfortable to go before our Holy God and admit wrongdoing. But unconfessed guilt makes us even more uncomfortable. When we humbly and gratefully give Him our worst, we express our love, appreciation and confidence for the One who willingly died for us in order to make us spotless and unblemished.

It is true. We can and we should “give Him our worst”. He responds by removing our sins “as far as the east is from the west”.⁷

More than forgiven

Christians often say we are “forgiven”, or “the penalty is paid”. Those are indeed meaningful truths, but

God’s forgiveness surpasses our human concept of forgiveness. You and I may forgive someone who has wronged us, but typically our relationship with that person will be hindered for a long time. But God’s love and care for us never wavers or diminishes. He simply “blots out” our sins, erasing them from our record, never to be mentioned again.

It is true however, that we may suffer consequences for our wrongdoing in this life, but when we come face to face with our Creator, we do not need to fear that He will recount our sins. When we meet our Heavenly Father face to face He will view us as without blemish, holy in His sight.

Let’s strive to give God our best by serving others in love, and to be aware of opportunities to do so. When we feel burdened and perplexed with cares, let’s respectfully present them to Jesus, our Lord, and ask Him to lighten our load. Let’s freely admit our sinfulness to our forgiving God. His gift of forgiveness comes by trusting in Jesus, and it is *total forgiveness*. Our Saviour has thoroughly triumphed over sin, defeated its rule over us, nullified its penalty and elevated us to a position of holiness.

Let’s anticipate the time when God will give us a physical and spiritual makeover. All our cares will be forgotten and our love and character will be perfected. Then we will be able to give Him our best *all* the time. □

¹ Romans 12:1

² 1 Corinthians 2:7

³ Matthew 11:28

⁴ 1 Peter 5:7

⁵ 1 John 1:1, 2

⁶ Hebrews 10:12

⁷ Psalms 103:12

The storms of life

Years ago, travelling preachers would come to town, pitch a large tent, preach the gospel nightly for about a week, then move on. People would come from miles around to hear God’s word expounded. In larger cities, such as St. Louis where I grew up in the early ’60s, they would set up on a vacant lot near a hub of activities. Whenever I hear Neil Diamond’s song *Brother Love’s Travelling Salvation Show*, childhood memories of mum hauling us to these revival meetings come to mind.

My dad believed in God, but wasn’t what you would call a church-going man in those days, so he only came with us once. Unfortunately, there was a bad storm the night before, resulting in some tent damage. As we nestled into the back row, the enthusiastic preacher was blaming this mishap on Satan and soon had everyone standing, pointing to the holes in the top of the tent and shouting, “I hate the devil. I hate the devil.” Everyone except my father, that is, who slipped our family out quietly and informed us that a preacher who didn’t have the sense to know God is the one who allowed the rain to fall isn’t one he wanted to listen to.

Dad taught me that while it may be convenient to blame our storms of life on the devil, God is the one ultimately in control. He said, “God is good, but it rains on everyone. Sometimes God stops the rain and sometimes He doesn’t.”

Jesus illustrated this with a parable about a foolish

by
**Barbara
Dahlgren**

man and a wise man who each built a house.¹ The foolish man built his house on a shaky foundation and the wise man built on a solid foundation. Then the rains came.

Many Christians feel that if they are nice to others and follow biblical principles, they will escape the rain. Oh no, my friend. The thunder will roar and the lightning will strike. It will rain on everyone: the good, the bad, the ugly, the beautiful, the just, the unjust, the atheist and the Christian. No one escapes the rain.

In the parable, it rained on both the foolish man’s house and the wise man’s house. But the foolish man’s house was wiped out, and the wise man’s was not, because he built his house on a solid foundation.

Spiritually speaking, the house represents our lives, and that rock-solid foundation is Jesus Christ. An unshakable foundation can be laid daily by believing Christ, walking with Him, talking with Him, and trusting Him. Those with a shaky foundation cut corners, play the angles, and are self-sufficient. When the storms of life come—and they do come—we rely on those whom we have grown accustomed to relying on. May that be Christ. As the saying goes, sometimes He calms the storm; sometimes He lets the storm rage and He calms us. □

¹ Luke 6:46–49

Living with people we can't stand

We love the company of people who make us feel good, people with a positive approach to people and life in general. On the other hand we're worn down by those who complain, grumble, criticise and make sarcastic remarks about anyone and anything.

How can we coexist with people who always see the negative side of things, people whose approach to life tears us apart mentally and emotionally? If possible we just want to run away or totally avoid them. But what if this isn't possible? What if we have to live or work closely with someone like this?

Gentle approach

First, let's acknowledge that we need some help. For Christians there is sound biblical advice found in Matthew 5:23–24. Approach people who have offended us, and suggest gently, humbly, how their behaviour bothers us. But if they make an effort to say they are sorry and yet slip back into their negative ways again, what do we do then? What if, despite our best efforts at reconciliation, we can't make headway? Should we give up and have a war of words with them? No! That will only make matters worse. Heated words will only trigger more heated words.¹

Even so, there is a better way yet.

Learn to let go

Jesus taught us to pray daily to our Heavenly Father for forgiveness of our sins *as we also forgive others for their offences towards us.*² That simple and yet profound prayer reminds us that we are all imperfect human beings. We make mistakes all the time and need God's mercy, compassion and forgiveness every day. Likewise, we also ought to give others the freedom to be imperfect and allow them to make mistakes every day (which is tantamount to forgiving them).

You may say: "But if we allow people to continue to make mistakes, how will they ever learn?" Well, if people are willing to see, with counsel and help, that their negative ways of life hurt themselves as well as others, and are prepared to try to make the necessary



by
Stefanie Tai

changes, it is a step forward. But if their ways of expressing themselves have become deeply ingrained negative habits, they will probably continue with the only way of life they know—a negative one. Let us find out from Jesus how He would handle a situation like this.

In the parable of the Unmerciful Servant,³ Peter comes to Jesus and asks, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answers, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times." In other words, don't

put a limit on your toleration. There may be an important lesson for *you* in how you react.

Jesus goes on to say that the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. The king cancelled all the massive debts of a servant who had begged him to. Unfortunately that particular servant refused to allow his fellow servant time to pay back the little debt owed to him and had instead thrown him into prison until he could settle the debt. When the king heard about this he said: "You wicked servant. I cancelled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?" In anger the king turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owned. Jesus concludes by saying: "This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

We might add to that advice found in the Old Testament: "Do not give your heart to all the words that people may speak, that you may not hear your servant calling down evil upon you. For your own heart well knows even many times that you, even you, have called

down evil upon others."⁴ It's foolhardy to over react when you feel that you have been badly treated. We have probably thought about, said things about, and treated others in the same negative way. Therefore, instead of reacting negatively, the advice we are given



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Free to live

Fluttering butterflies chasing each other in circles is always a source of delight! As these quivering petals claim the whole dance floor of space before us, their playful antics evoke in us the joy of freedom. Perhaps, this is their celebration dance of new life, as their long dark life in the chrysalis is now behind them.

God, through Jesus Christ, has invited us to join in the Great Dance of life too! The Holy Spirit given us at baptism is our Entry Pass. When we trust and accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour from our long dark life of sin, we're given entry into the kingdom life of the Light. We're in! Our continual trusting and accepting God's genuine love for us will enable us to know who He is, and to know Him more. In effect, God is telling us, "I already know you through and through. Now I want you to know Me"—by relating to Him as our heavenly Papa who protects and provides for us, as the Lover of our soul who is faithful and cherishes us. For us, this "getting-to-know-You" part is real living! Through Christ, this is living the eternal (though not immortal) life now!¹ Dr John Stott, one of the world's most respected Bible teachers, teaches that freedom to live this life now is one of the outstanding features of this new life in Christ.²

Our Christian freedom begins with lifting of the burden of having to secure our salvation by obedience to the law.³ One of the chief privileges of this freedom is that guilt from a guilty conscience has no hold on us anymore. In its place, we now have the unspeakable joy of forgiveness, acceptance and access to God, through the Holy Spirit in us.⁴

Having said that, we must be reminded that our Christian freedom is not an absolute licence from all boundaries and restrictions. We can't use this new freedom to support our old sinful self-centred way of life. Authentic Christian freedom and suffocating self-centredness are diametrically opposite.

Left to ourselves, we naturally gravitate towards indulging our human desires, which unfortunately are character flaws—lust and greed for power and for pleasure. Starting as sinful practices they become our

by
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habits, then our choices and finally our character traits. Dr John Stott opines, "...today the pursuit of money, fame and influence is a concealed drive for power." It permeates the secular and religious life, and churches are not immune! Of course, the call to satisfy our pleasure-fix is ever present—through entertainment, food, drugs and sex. Only when we're empowered by the Holy Spirit can we freely choose to restrain ourselves from acting sinfully. How? This is done when, through God's help, we "bring every thought and everything under His control"⁵—bit by bit, day by day.

That is good news! The Holy Spirit in us sets us free from this self-centred life to pursue a God-centred life. This new life weighs issues and situations by God's values, and their importance is determined by where they fit into God's purpose for us. For example, the significance of health and wealth in this life is radically different in each of these two lifestyles. Things we used to crave for—possessions, acceptance and admiration from peers—have now lost their grip on us. We're set free from what Malcom Muggeridge calls "the dark little dungeon of our own ego" and can now spend our life energy on things that really matter.⁶ This is how to love ourselves.

Our Christian freedom frees us to serve the needy and vulnerable people around us. We once might use every opportunity to turn things to our benefit; now we are enabled to work for the benefit of other people—without any ulterior motive. It is just an outflow of life-giving Love from within us, and we make no effort to claim credit because it is God doing it, not us. Participating in this new life is reward enough!

Really, when we can freely choose to love ourselves and others in these ways, aren't we in effect fulfilling the law?⁷ About 2,000 years ago, Jesus said He had come to fulfil the Law;⁸ and through us now, He still is! So, the next time a flitting butterfly crosses our path, let's be reminded that we're now given the freedom of conscience and the freedom of action. We're free to live life now! □

¹ John 17:3

² John 8: 31–32

³ Galatians 2:16, 3:2–3

⁴ Romans 5:1–2

⁵ Philippians 3:18–23; 2 Corinthians 10:5

⁶ Luke 12:31

⁷ Galatians 5:14

⁸ Matthew 5:17

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is to react positively towards such people and situations by remembering that God again is the final Judge of us all.⁵

Acceptance

We must accept that we can't force the negative thoughts out of others. It's a personal choice if someone chooses to be negative-minded. By accepting that we are not responsible for their negative actions, we can actually free ourselves from the stress and tensions of expecting others, including ourselves, to live up to a perfect image. With that freedom and space, come

peace and clear thinking, respect and concern for others.

No matter how repulsive we may find someone to be we can take another cue from Paul who admonishes us "to concentrate on what is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praise-worthy."⁶ Set out to look out for one or two good qualities in such people and focus on these. Who knows, we may actually discover more admirable and praiseworthy qualities. □

¹ Proverbs 17:14

² Matthew 6:12

³ Matthew 18:21–35

⁴ Ecclesiastes 7:21–22

⁵ Roman 14:10

⁶ Philippians 4:4–9

Already saved, being saved

Is there a contradiction?

The Bible uses three phrases—*already saved*, *being saved*, *will be saved*—when speaking about salvation. *Already saved* is in the past tense, *being saved* is in the present tense and *will be saved* is in the future tense. Are believers already saved, being saved or will be saved? Is there a contradiction?

We need to interpret these phrases correctly so that our faith in God's word is not shaken.

Already saved

Some verses in the Bible tell us that believers (Christians) are *already saved*. For example:

"...I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are *saved*, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain."¹

"For by grace you *have been saved* through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."²

"...according to His mercy He *saved* us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."³

The above verses tell us that in Christ believers are already saved, meaning that they have been forgiven, reconciled and given the gift of eternal life. And, because they are already saved, they need not worry about their salvation because it is assured. This is very liberating as they can now enjoy their new (saved) life in Christ.

Being saved

Some verses also tell us that believers are *being saved* now. For example:

"...praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were *being saved*."⁴

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are *being saved* it is the power of God."⁵

"For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are *being saved* and among those who are perishing."⁶

These verses tell us that believers are in the process of being saved as they continue to overcome their weaknesses and grow spiritually. The implication is: they are still imperfect and therefore must go on to perfection even though their salvation is secure because of what Christ did for them. Some, however, misinterpret it to mean that they must overcome sufficiently in order to attain salvation (salvation by works).

Will be saved

Yet other verses tell us that believers *will be saved* in



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the future. For example:

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you *will be saved*, you and your household."⁷

"For whoever calls on the name of the LORD *shall be saved*."⁸

"Nevertheless she *will be saved* in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control."⁹

These verses tell us that believers will be saved when Jesus comes to resurrect them. As in the previous case,



this implies that believers must overcome and grow spiritually even though their salvation is secure in Christ. As in the previous case, some also misinterpret it.

Let's summarise: The *already saved* case seems to be good news because it guarantees salvation based solely on what Christ did for us, not based on how much we have overcome (salvation by grace). Christ has overcome our sin for us. The *being saved* and *will be saved* cases basically say the same thing but some

saved, will be saved contradiction?

misinterpret to mean that their salvation is contingent on their overcoming and growing (salvation by works).

So does the Bible contradict itself by giving different versions of salvation?

Perceived contradiction

The Bible is God's word (truth). It doesn't contradict itself. The key to understanding scripture is to interpret it correctly in context. Some verses state God's truth

their bad experiences or hurt feelings (which are subjective), see themselves as not yet saved. The lack of fruits of the Holy Spirit seems to confirm their feelings. But the truth is, in Christ, our salvation is secure. It is not dependent on our feelings and experiences. It is based *solely* on what God has done for us in Christ. That is true grace. So we need not fret and worry. Instead, we thank God and live our new lives in a radically different way—in the power of the



objectively—as *it really is*—while other verses state it subjectively—as *how people perceive, feel and experience it*. Objective truth is based on God's word. It doesn't depend on the believers' perceptions, feelings and experiences, which are subjective. They may vary from individual to individual and over time. So when we read scripture, we must ask 'is it stating objective truth as God tells us' or 'is it stating subjective feelings and experiences of believers.'

While the objective truth holds, some, because of

Holy Spirit.

Already saved assures us that we are okay as far as salvation is concerned. *Being saved* and *will be saved* motivate us to overcome and grow spiritually so that we experience the abundant life that Jesus promised. Salvation is entirely by grace. *But grace always leads us to obey God and bear good fruits.*

Salvation is re-creation

Some people view salvation as a *transaction* like buying

a product and paying for it. They say something like this: “God loves you, but you must repent and believe Jesus. Only then you can receive salvation.” In effect, what they are saying is: you must repent and believe to receive salvation. But that is salvation by works (not by grace) as it depends on *your* repentance and belief.

God offers salvation freely to all before our believing or obedience. Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ. And it *doesn't* depend on us—not even on our repentance and belief. Jesus *assumed* our sinful nature, *overcame* and made it *perfect and holy*. He did this before we even knew or believed Him. That's why salvation is *re-creation* and not transaction. That's why it is a gift. We just receive and enjoy it.

What about unbelievers?

So far, we only discussed salvation for believers. What about unbelievers—those who have not known or believed Jesus, including those who had died without hearing or knowing Jesus? Where do they stand?

God sent Jesus to save humanity from sin and death and give them eternal life. Jesus' incarnation—His birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension—is for *all* people in *all* generations including believers and those who are yet to believe in Him.

Scripture tells us that all have sinned and deserved to die. But God is extremely gracious. He didn't create us just to zap us! If He did that, He wouldn't be God because God is love, and He created us so we might enjoy a loving relationship with Him as His own beloved children.

Let's look at a few verses to convince ourselves of the universal nature of salvation. St. Paul declared that Jesus has *justified all, reconciled all* and *saved all*. And this justification, reconciliation and salvation occurs when we were *still powerless, still sinners* and *still God's enemies*.¹⁰ He spoke to believers, but he clearly implied that it applied to all—believers and non-believers alike.

“...when I am lifted up from the earth, [I] will draw *all men* to myself.”¹¹

“He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also *for the sins of the whole world*.”¹²

“This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance...that we have put our hope in the living God, who is *the Saviour of all men*...”¹³

“...the Lamb of God, who *takes away the sin of the world!*”¹⁴

“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be *the Saviour of the world*.”¹⁵

“All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God *was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ*, not counting men's sins against them.”¹⁶

God is love. His love is unconditional. His love includes all people in all generations. He loves us *as much as* He loves Himself and He will *never* stop loving us even if we deny or reject His love. And He loves everyone the *same*, not some people (like believers) more and others (like unbelievers) less like we human beings do. God's ways are infinitely higher than ours.

Jesus' incarnation includes everyone. Jesus repented and was baptised for us. He was tempted in the wilderness for us. He overcame and defeated sin for us. He took our sinful nature into Himself and perfected it for us. He died and rose for us. He *stands for us* as our *vicarious* humanity. That's why we say: When He died,

we died; when He rose, we rose; He is seated at the right hand of God in heaven; and we too are seated at the right hand of God in heaven. Jesus stands before God *holy and righteous* in *our* place and on *our* behalf. How else can we really be holy and righteous?

Jesus didn't retire in heaven after He had finished His earthly mission. He continues to minister to us from heaven as our High Priest, Mediator and Intercessor. He continues to bear our burden and intercede for us. He takes our flawed and imperfect prayers and sacrifices, redeems and makes them as His own and offers to God as sweet smelling aroma pleasing to God. He is *always* there for us and that should comfort us in all our trials and sufferings. He is indeed our *eternal* High Priest. That's why salvation is a free gift, received by grace through faith in Christ, not based on anything that we do.

God has forgiven, justified and reconciled *all* people for Christ's sake. His salvation extends to all people in all generations, but not all see, know, believe or experience it now. But they will in due time when Jesus is revealed to them. The truth will then set them free so that they too can enjoy their new life in Christ.

One may ask the question: if salvation is also freely available to unbelievers, then why do they need to repent and obey? The answer is: if they don't, they will not know or experience God's love for them. They will be filled with fear, anxiety, estrangement and rejection, especially during severe trials and difficulties. In this *alienated* state, they *cannot* experience God's *heaven* filled with love, joy, peace, assurance, security, communion and eternal life through the Holy Spirit. However, when they turn to God, things change miraculously. The Holy Spirit enters into their lives and unites them to Christ to enable them to freely commune and participate in God's life of love and never-ending joy.

No contradiction

Let's summarise. The objective truth is: *all* people—beginning with Adam to the last person to be born—are included in God's plan of salvation. The Parable of the Great Banquet and the Parable of the Wedding Supper illustrate this beautifully.¹⁷ God through Jesus has eternally bound the entire human race to Himself by the power of the Holy Spirit and He will never let us go. In Him, we live, move and have our being¹⁸ and nothing, absolutely nothing, can separate us from the love of God.¹⁹ That is how much God loves us.

God's word doesn't contradict itself. All three phrases—already saved, being saved, will be saved—are true. But we must interpret them in context. We must ask “do they refer to God's objective truth” or “do they refer to peoples' subjective feelings and experiences”. God offers salvation freely to all and it doesn't depend on our feelings and experiences. It depends solely on what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. May this truth ground and anchor your faith in the sure word of God. □

Reference

An introduction to Trinitarian, Christ-centered Theology. Grace Communion International, 2009.

¹ 1 Corinthians 15:1–2

² Ephesians 2:8

³ Titus 3:4–7

⁴ Act 2:47

⁵ 1 Corinthians 1:18

⁶ 2 Corinthians 2:15

⁷ Acts 16:31

⁸ Romans 10:13

⁹ 1 Timothy 2:15

¹⁰ Romans 5:1–10

¹¹ John 12:32

¹² 1 John 2:2

¹³ 1 Timothy 4:9–10

¹⁴ John 1:29

¹⁵ 1 John 4:14

¹⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:18–19

¹⁷ Matthew 22:2–14; Luke 14:16–24

¹⁸ Acts 17:28

¹⁹ Romans 8:31–39

What is your anchor in life?

There are so many people who are living with insurmountable troubles that make their lives miserable, full of anguish or filled with constant worry. I was reminded of this when I met a friend at a conference recently. He was lively and full of laughter during the conference and a real outgoing participant during the group workshops. We spent almost a week together and one night a few of us together with this friend decided to try out some of the local delicacies at a restaurant in town.

We had an enjoyable time and just before getting back to our hotel three of us decided to stop for tea at a nearby stall. We began talking and as time passed we started reminiscing the old days when we began our careers as young men in distant remote areas of the country. My friend eventually began to pour out some troubles that we never knew he was struggling with. We learnt that he was taking care of two siblings and an aged mother who all lived with him. The problem was that both his siblings were on wheelchairs as they had physical impediments that made walking impossible for them. They were his elder brother who was in his sixties and his sister who was in her forties. Both needed someone to take care of them. His mother who was eighty years old was physically frail and needed special care too. No one else was willing to look after these people and my friend had to bear the full responsibility. He related to us how if one of them slipped off the wheelchair they would be on the floor the whole day until he arrived back from work to lift them back on to the wheelchair.

Then things got worse. He suffered a heart attack. Thankfully, it was a mild one but it sent shivers through the whole family. Tears welled up in my friend's eyes as he related how his sister and mother cried out in anguish as he was being taken to the hospital. They said that if he was not coming back they would rather die with him than live life without his love and care. They had no one else to depend on. There was no relative willing to take on the responsibility of taking care of three



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physically dependent individuals. They would be left destitute. By the grace of God, my friend recovered well enough to return home in a short time but is on medication for a heart condition. He related how even for the conference that he was attending he had to get someone to look in on his family once in a while, all the time hoping that they were not in any difficulty. He seemed happy and jovial but worry was constantly plaguing him. That night he poured his heart out to us. How many others are in situations such as this? How many would find themselves out on the streets if the sole bread winner of the family died? How many live

their lives anchored on to one individual who is almost like God to them?

The answer is that there are far more people in such situations than we realise. Many who read this article will be able to connect with my friend as they are facing similar or even worse situations. Where do these suffering 'anchors' go for help? Even more than physical help it is spiritual help that they require for their mental agony. My friend constantly worries what would happen to his siblings if he was not around. The Bible brings to our attention a very real individual who understands these sufferings and who willingly wants to help us carry the burdens that weigh down in our hearts. Jesus Christ invites all who are suffering to come to Him. "Come to Me all you who labour and are heavily laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and my burden is light."¹ There are no strings attached as He has already paid for our sins through His blood shed on the cross.

Jesus understands suffering because He went through it. He knows that you need an anchor in life in order to carry on. His hands are stretched out to you. Take His hand and lay your burdens on Him. He is well able to carry it for you. □



¹ Matthew 11:
28–30

Forgiveness and reco

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.¹

Forgiveness is like cancelling a debt from someone who owes us money. Maybe this person is not worthy of receiving this kind of treatment, but by the grace of God, I am willing to give this person the grace that I have received from God. In our interpersonal relationships, if I was hurt or treated unfairly, I chose not to seek revenge. Instead, I will forgive the person unconditionally. Unless I forgive the person, no reconciliation is possible. However, the step of forgiveness will not necessarily lead to reconciliation.

In our life's journey, learning how to forgive is one of the most important lessons we need to experience. In our interpersonal relationships, there will be conflicts. People will misunderstand and even hurt us. Where there is hurt, forgiveness needs to be applied so that the relationship can have the chance to heal. Since marriage is the most intimate human relationship, it also has the greatest tendency to have conflicts and hurts. Therefore, marriage provides the best 'classroom' to learn the lesson of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Some may say, "How can I forgive the person who has never apologised for the hurt he has inflicted and has not repented of his actions." That sounds reasonable, but the truth is that forgiveness is a decision that is solely dependent on the one who is victimised. It is independent of the action of the perpetrator. In other words, whether or not the perpetrator comes to me to apologise, whether or not the person shows any sign of repentance, the decision to forgive is entirely my own. In a marital relationship, reconciliation is always sought after forgiveness is given. But it takes two willing people to make it happen. When this is not possible, the marriage will suffer and die due to the toxin within—the unforgiving spirit.

The spirit of forgiveness is needed in order to develop a close relationship. This is even more so in marriage. Let's discuss this in four situations.

Hurts and conflicts in everyday life

Since the husband and the wife are two different people with different ideas and viewpoints, there will be times when they have conflicts and disagreements. Unless we learn how to resolve our conflicts by communicating, understanding, apologising for wrongdoing, forgiving the wrong done to us, and seeking reconciliation with each other, our hearts will become disconnected. Then there will be no way of developing an intimate relationship. Constantly and mutually giving forgiveness and seeking reconciliation is what a committed marriage is all about. After having been married for almost 32 years, I have come to see how important the role forgiveness plays in a marital relationship. For example, one time when my wife



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came home from a hard day's work as a teacher in an elementary school, she told me how the students have driven her crazy because of their bad behaviour. Instead of trying to understand her and to show empathy to her, I tried to fix her 'problems'. Needless to say, the rest of the night was not a pleasant time at all. I had hurt my wife's feelings and our relationship suffered because I was not sensitive to her emotion at that moment. I eventually needed to learn the lesson of humility and to admit the mistakes, to apologise for the mishap and to change for the better next time. My wife on the other hand needed to learn how to apply grace to forgive me and to be reconciled to each other. Through this process we grow to become more mature emotionally and spiritually. So conflicts in marriage are good for us in that they help us learn the lesson of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Extramarital affairs

Forgiving a mate who has been unfaithful is one of the most difficult things a person could be asked to do. In fact, many think that this is humanly impossible. This kind of forgiveness requires God's help, for our human love is just too weak to be able to achieve that.

If you are the one who has been betrayed by your partner, you have at least three choices: (1) You can pretend that nothing has happened and hope things will work out. You may even think that time will heal everything; (2) You can refuse to forgive your partner, thinking that this is a way to hold power over the other person and also a way for revenge; or (3) You can apply the grace that you have received from God and forgive the person. The first two choices will only lead you to stay in victim mode. You will carry the burden and hurt for the rest of your life. Time will not heal us until we let go of the hurt and burden by forgiving the person. The third choice is the way to peace and healing since you let go of the bondage of hurt and bitterness. You literally give the burden to God.

The healing process after an extramarital affair starts with forgiveness. But this is only the first step. Whether this will lead to reconciliation and rebuilding of the marriage depends on several factors. For example, if the husband has an affair, he needs to stop the affair if he wants to keep his marriage. Even if the wife forgives his betrayal, she needs to see that her husband truly has repented of what he has done. He needs to completely rebuild the trust of his wife, since his betrayal has destroyed the foundation of their marriage, which is based on trust. This healing and recovery process will take time and can be very messy with a lot of tears, sadness, and anger. They need the help, support, and prayers from many people such as friends, church brethren, pastors, and professional counsellors. Despite the best efforts of one or both partners, there are certain situations where reconciliation is not possible due to the following

nciliation in marriage

reasons: (1) The husband (in this example) does not stop the extramarital relationship; (2) The 'repentance' is not genuine because there is no fruit of repentance shown by his actions and attitudes; (3) The husband does not have the sincerity and patience to nurture and comfort his wife during the healing process; and (4) The hurt is so deep that the wife just cannot bear to live with the husband anymore. Unfortunately, in many instances divorce and broken families are the results of an extramarital affair.

Forgive our family of origin

We have all come from imperfect families in which

life ahead.

We all have endured diverse kinds of pain, hurt, and mistreatment as we go through life's journey. We may have carried that burden for many years without even being aware of it. We can make a decision to leave the burden behind and give it to God. We can forgive our past, our family of origin and all those family members or people who have hurt us. We can break that bondage and be free again. Of course this is very hard to do by our own human strength. Maybe we can reflect on how Jesus sacrificed His life and shed His blood to forgive our sins. This will help us to choose the path of forgiving others.



we may have been hurt, mistreated or even abused. We may have inherited some character traits that can negatively impact our relationships. For example, if the wife was sexually abused as a child and this issue was never dealt with, it will profoundly affect her relationship with her husband, especially in the area of physical intimacy. Unless she goes through the process of healing with God's help, she will have problems enjoying an intimate marital relationship with her partner. She will need to forgive the person who has abused her and let go of the burden and hurt. Even if the person has long been dead, she still can forgive that person, be healed by God's grace, and get on with her

Blended families

Building a successful relationship in a blended family is one of the most challenging situations in marriage. Most of these families have children from previous marriages. Many people get into this kind of relationship without proper preparation. When a marriage ends, whether it is because of divorce or death, it will still take time to grieve over the death of a relationship. It may take a year or two or even longer. We need to reflect and forgive ourselves of failure in our first marriage and learn lessons from it.

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The Forgettery

A conversation with one of my teenage sons sometimes goes kind of like this: I say, “Did you make your bed?” He gives me a blank stare, then races to his room spouting the words, “I forgot.”

“I forgot” covers for a whole host of less legitimate excuses, like “I really didn’t want to” or “It wasn’t that important to me.” My husband calls this “I forgot” syndrome the *Forgettery*, a place in the mind where we file requests or obligations that we just plain don’t want to do.

“He must have filed it in his Forgettery,” my husband says, as my son slinks into the bathroom to hang up his bath towel.

“That Forgettery is going to be expensive,” I say. (I found that charging the boys 50 cents each time I have to do one of their chores is a good way to make responsible citizens of them.)

But every once in a while, the Forgettery works in my favour. One weekend, my older son took a shower in the early afternoon after mowing the lawn, with the understanding that he could skip his usual evening bath. For him, showering and smelling clean are not yet high priorities. I can count on more than one hand the times I had to do a “sniff” test and then send the offender back to the shower to do it over again.

This time, though, he forgot that he had already showered and ended up taking another one. I almost expected the sun to stand still and the earth to rotate backward on its axis. Never before had this boy cleaned himself up without complaining about it, not just once, but *twice* in one day. There was more to this Forgettery than I thought.

I, too, have a Forgettery, and I’m ashamed to admit that I’ve used it on more than one occasion. “Did you see that button on my suit pants?” my husband asks.

“I’m sorry, honey, I guess I forgot,” I say. “You know, with all I’ve got going on...kids, school, cooking, cleaning...” He shakes his head and walks away, wearing his suit pants minus a back pocket button. He isn’t buying it, and I shouldn’t be selling it.

The Forgettery might seem handy at the time, but it

by
**Nanette
Kuhlman**

usually ends up biting your backside. With my kids, it’s 50 cents and a mild word of reminder. With me, just knowing I’ve let someone down is punishment enough.

The Forgettery of forgiveness

But aren’t there things, biblically speaking, that we *should* forget? Like when somebody offends us, or is less than considerate to us, or lets us down in some way?

When it comes to the Forgettery, I guess, the real issue is what you put there. When we forget grievances, hurts, and disappointments, we find others more willing to overlook our own shortcomings. I’m hoping my button incident is lost deep in my husband’s

Forgettery. Which means that I have to drop his dirty-socks-on-the-floor incident in my Forgettery.

God has a Forgettery, too. Psalm 103:12 describes it this way: “He has removed our rebellious acts as far away from us as the east is from the west.”

I’m reminded of Edmund in C.S. Lewis’s *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Although Edmund had betrayed his siblings and fallen prey to the White Witch, Aslan made certain to let Edmund know his betrayal was forgotten. “Here is your brother,” Aslan said to Peter, Susan, and Lucy, “and there is no need to talk to him about what is past.”

Most of the time, our hurts and

disappointments are not of the magnitude inflicted by Edmund on his brother and sisters. They’re more of the daily irritations that come from people living with people.

Sometimes the hurts we suffer are hard to forget. If Peter, Susan and Lucy were real people, I’m sure they would have had trouble forgetting what their brother had done to them. Even though God completely forgets our sins, forgetting is not so easy for us, whether it’s damage we’ve suffered at the hands of others or guilt over our own past.



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Parable of workers in the vineyard

In the parable of the workers in the vineyard,¹ some men worked all day long in the heat of the day. Some worked only half a day, and some worked only one hour, but they all got paid the same amount, a day's wage. Some got exactly what they agreed to, but others got more. However, the men who worked all day long said, "That's not fair. We worked all day long, and it's not fair to pay us the same as those who worked less."

But the men who worked all day got exactly what they had agreed to before they began work. The only reason they got upset was because other people got more than they deserved.

What did the paymaster say? He said: "Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

The boss said he would give them a fair day's wage for a fair day's work, and that's what he did—and yet the workers complained. Why? Because they compared themselves with others and they got the shorter end of the stick. They got their hopes up, and then they were disappointed.

But the landowner said: "I am doing you no wrong. If you think it's not fair, the problem is in what you expected, not in what you actually got. If it hadn't been for the amount I paid the newcomers, you would be quite happy with what I gave you. The problem is in your expectations, not in what I did. You accuse me of being bad, simply because I was good to someone else."

How would you react to this? What would you think if your boss gave a bonus to the newest employees, but not to the old faithful workers? It would not be very good for morale, would it? But Jesus was not giving us payroll advice here—He was telling a parable about the kingdom of God.

The parable reflected something that was happening in Jesus' ministry. God was giving salvation to people who hadn't worked very hard, and the religious leaders



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**

“The time we’ve spent in the church is nothing to God. The work we’ve done is nothing compared with what He can do. Even at our best, as another parable says, we are unprofitable servants.”

said: "That's not fair. You can't be generous to them. We've been working hard, and they have hardly been working." And Jesus replied, "I am bringing good news to sinners, not to the righteous." His teaching threatened to undermine the normal motive for doing good.

Where do we fit in?

We might like to think that we have worked all day long, bearing the burdens and the heat of the day, deserving a good reward. But we have not.

It doesn't matter how long you've been in the church or how many sacrifices you have made; those are

nothing in comparison with what God is giving us. Paul worked harder than any of us; he made more sacrifices for the gospel than we realise, but he counted it all as a loss for Christ. It was nothing.

The time we've spent in the church is nothing to God. The work we've done is nothing compared with what He can do. Even at our best, as another parable says, we are unprofitable servants.² Jesus has bought our entire lives; He has fair claim on every thought and every action. We cannot possibly give Him anything on top of that—even if we do everything He commands.

We are really like the workers who worked only one hour and got a whole day's wage. We just barely got started, and we were paid as if we actually did something useful. Is that fair? Maybe we shouldn't even ask the question. If the judgment is in our favour, we shouldn't ask for another opinion!

Do we think of ourselves as people who have worked long and hard? Do we think we deserve more than we are getting? Or do we see ourselves as people who are getting an undeserved gift, regardless of how long we've worked? □

¹ Matthew 20

² Luke 17:10

continued from page 18

I take comfort in Paul's words: "Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead, I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us up to heaven."¹ We aren't alone in our struggles to forget things that need to be forgotten. The trick Paul reveals is that not only can we forget, but we can also look forward to what lies ahead—"I keep working toward that day when I will finally be all that Christ Jesus saved me for and wants me to be."²

¹ Philippians 3:13–14

² Philippians 3:12

So the idea of a Forgettery isn't such a bad one. (After all, God Himself has one—a totally righteous and awesome one.) The key is what you put in it. If my husband forgets that I forgot to sew a button on, and if I forget how he forgot to pick up his socks, well, that might just help reduce the friction between us that comes from living together. And it might give just a little taste of what it will be like when we're all that Jesus wants us to be. □

God is in our moments

My dad used to say time goes so fast it seems as if every other day is Thursday. When time goes that quickly, the seconds, minutes and hours of life can run together and get lost. James was right—life is like a mist that appears for a little while then vanishes.¹

“Teach us to number our days aright,” Moses asked God, “that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”² How do we do this? Author Mark Buchanan suggests we “work out where time and eternity meet. Pay attention to how God is afoot in the mystery of each moment, in its mad rush or maddening plod. He is present in both. But too often, we are so time-obsessed that we take no time to really notice.”³

Do you pay attention to how God is afoot in the mystery of each moment? Or do you let them blur together in a mad rush to get everything done?

I may have mentioned a time or two I'm a big *Star Trek* fan. I enjoyed all the movies (even the odd-numbered ones). In *Insurrection*, a Ba'ku woman named Anij teaches Captain Jean-Luc Picard how to capture a single moment. She slows time, allowing him to see the beating wings of a hummingbird as it hovers over a flower. When her life is in danger, he practices this technique and is able to keep her alive until help arrives.

While we can't slow time (I wish), we can pause

by
Tammy Tkach

to notice the mystery of God in our moments. Pick a moment and focus on where you are, what you're doing, who you're with and how God is present. Take a mental snapshot and praise God for what you see. In a way, time will slow down and you'll be fully in the moment.

I remember doing this one day when my kids and I were at a park. It was a beautiful day—perfect weather, everyone was happy and healthy. We were with a good friend and my kids were playing and laughing. As I watched them, I realised this was one of those perfect moments in time that would never come again. I took a mental snapshot, noting every detail of the moment. I can still picture it in my mind, many years later.

Why is this important, you may be wondering? We are told: “People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades.”⁴ We

aren't here long, and we look forward to a better future with the Lord. But while we're here, we might as well enjoy it. The Westminster Shorter Catechism states: “Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever.”

Let yourself slow down a little and enjoy God, giving Him glory and thanks as you go through your day. He is present in the meeting of time and eternity as we live, move and have our being in Him. □



¹ James 4:14
² Psalm 90:12
³ Nelson, Thomas. *The Rest of God*, 2006.
⁴ 1 Peter 1:24

Don't hide your problems

The forest dwelling Bassa people of Cameroon have a saying that goes, “*U sooh nkon, u sooh yag matibla*.” Translated into English, it means, “If you hide the sickness, you hide the treatment.” The point is that you can't help someone who won't reveal what their problem is.

God didn't make us to be loners. We are all connected as children of our Father in heaven, brothers and sisters of our Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul wrote that we all “live and move and have our being” in God.¹

Our need for others is never more pressing than when we face crises and challenges in our lives. The

by
Kalengule Kaoma

kind reassurance of another person can calm our fears, soothe our nerves and hold us up in times of trial. Finding professional support to help us through marriage problems or financial difficulties can make the difference between success or failure. And telling a qualified physician about our physical symptoms can save our lives.

We can all take a word of wisdom from the Bassa: Are we hiding our needs from the people who want to help us?

Our shoulders might be broad, but no shoulders are broad enough to carry the whole world. □

¹ Acts 17:28

God created human beings to live in fellowship with Himself.
John Leith

Jesus Christ ministers the things of God to us and the things of humankind to God.
St. Athanasius

Not only was God in Christ, not only did God work through Christ, but that God came as the man Jesus.
St. Athanasius

As Jesus Christ God has really come among us, indwelling our history in His flesh as the actual Word of God in such a way that He is the place where God speaks and acts in saving love toward us and for our salvation. Jesus Christ is God for us.
St. Athanasius

Through Jesus Christ, God has definitely accessed our world. God has entered into the dire plight of humankind to bring forgiveness of sin and restoration to communion with the Father.
St. Athanasius

When we deal with Jesus we are not dealing with a representative of God, but with God. Who God is in Jesus is who God is.
Andrew Purves

Jesus is not a big deal; He is the whole deal! He is not a name on a list; He is the whole list. That is what it means that He is Lord.
Andrew Purves

We are consecrated and dedicated to God; therefore, we may not hereafter think, speak,

meditate or do anything but with a view to His glory. We are God's; to Him, therefore, let us live and die.
John Calvin

The weaker we feel, the harder we lean. And the harder we lean, the stronger we grow spiritually, even while our bodies waste away.
J.I. Packer

Most of the stuff people worry about ain't never gonna happen anyway. Remember that silence

A holy life is not an ascetic, or gloomy, or solitary life, but a life regulated by divine truth and faithful in Christian duty. It is living above the world while we are still in it.
Tryone Edwards

Prayer is not intended to change God's purpose, nor is it to move Him to form fresh purposes. God has decreed that certain events shall come to pass through the means He has appointed for



Prayer honours God, acknowledges His being, exalts His power, adores His providence, secures His aid.
E.M. Bounds

is sometimes the best answer.
Anonymous

Live a good, honourable life. Then when you get older and think back, you'll enjoy it a second time.
Anonymous

The furnace of affliction is a good place for you, Christian; it benefits you; it helps you to become more like Christ, and it is fitting you for heaven.
C.H. Spurgeon

their accomplishment.
A.W. Pink

When we say "I believe in God" (a) we are pledging our allegiance to the God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ and (b) we are describing who this God is to whom we have pledged our loyalty... We believe in this God because this God has met us in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.
Michael Jinkins

The Word of God [Jesus], whom we meet by the power of God's Spirit, gives us access to God the Father.
Michael Jinkins

We should submit whatever we believe first to the Bible, then to tradition, then to our own individual experiences.
Michael Jinkins

The only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. Our charities should pinch and hamper us. If we live at the same level of affluence as other people who have our level of income, we are probably giving away too little.
G.S. Lewis

Seek for happiness and you will never find it. Seek righteousness and you will discover you are happy. It will be there without your knowing it, without your seeking it.
D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

The glory of the incarnation is that it presents to our adoring gaze not a humanised God or a deified man, but a true God-man—one who is all that God is and at the same time all that man is: one on whose almighty arm we can rest, and to whose human sympathy we

can appeal.
Benjamin B. Warfield

Jesus Christ is everywhere; He is behind everything we see if only we have eyes to see Him; and He is the Lord of history if only we penetrate deep enough beneath the surface.
Charles Malik

Three things are called precious in the Scriptures: the blood of Christ is called "precious blood"; faith is called "precious faith"; and the promises are called "precious promises".
Thomas Brooks

Adversity is the diamond dust Heaven polishes its jewels with.
Robert Leighton

Some are dead; you must rouse them. Some are troubled; you must comfort them. Others are burdened; you must point them to the burden-bearer. Still more are puzzled; you must enlighten them. Still others are careless and indifferent; you must warn and woo them.
C.H. Spurgeon

Faith helps us when we are down; but unbelief throws us down when we are up.
John Bunyan

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Staying on track

A study of 2 Timothy 3

In Paul's last letter (2 Timothy 3) to his favourite assistant, he warns Timothy about the opposition that Timothy will face, and encourages him to continue what he already knows is true.

Living in terrible times¹

This chapter begins with a warning: But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. Many Jews speculated about what the future held, and many predicted that society would reach its worst point just before God intervened to straighten everything out. As verse 5 makes clear, Paul is saying that the "last days" are already under way.²

But that was almost 1,950 years ago. How could the first century be the "last days"? Either Paul was mistaken as to how soon Christ would return, or else we are mistaken in how Paul is using the language of prophecy. Or both.

It is a mistake for us to look at Paul's description, see it happening around us, and conclude that Christ will soon return. We live in the last days, yes, but so did Paul. If Christ's return could be 2,000 years away from Paul, it might be for us, too. It could be very soon, but it might not, and current events do not prove it one way or the other.

Let's look at Paul's description: People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power.

Missing from this list is torture, murder and genocide; the list seems a bit tame in comparison with atrocities that also existed in the ancient world. Paul is not describing the worst of all possible worlds—he is describing Timothy's opponents: people who might look like they are godly, but who are actually rejecting the gospel.

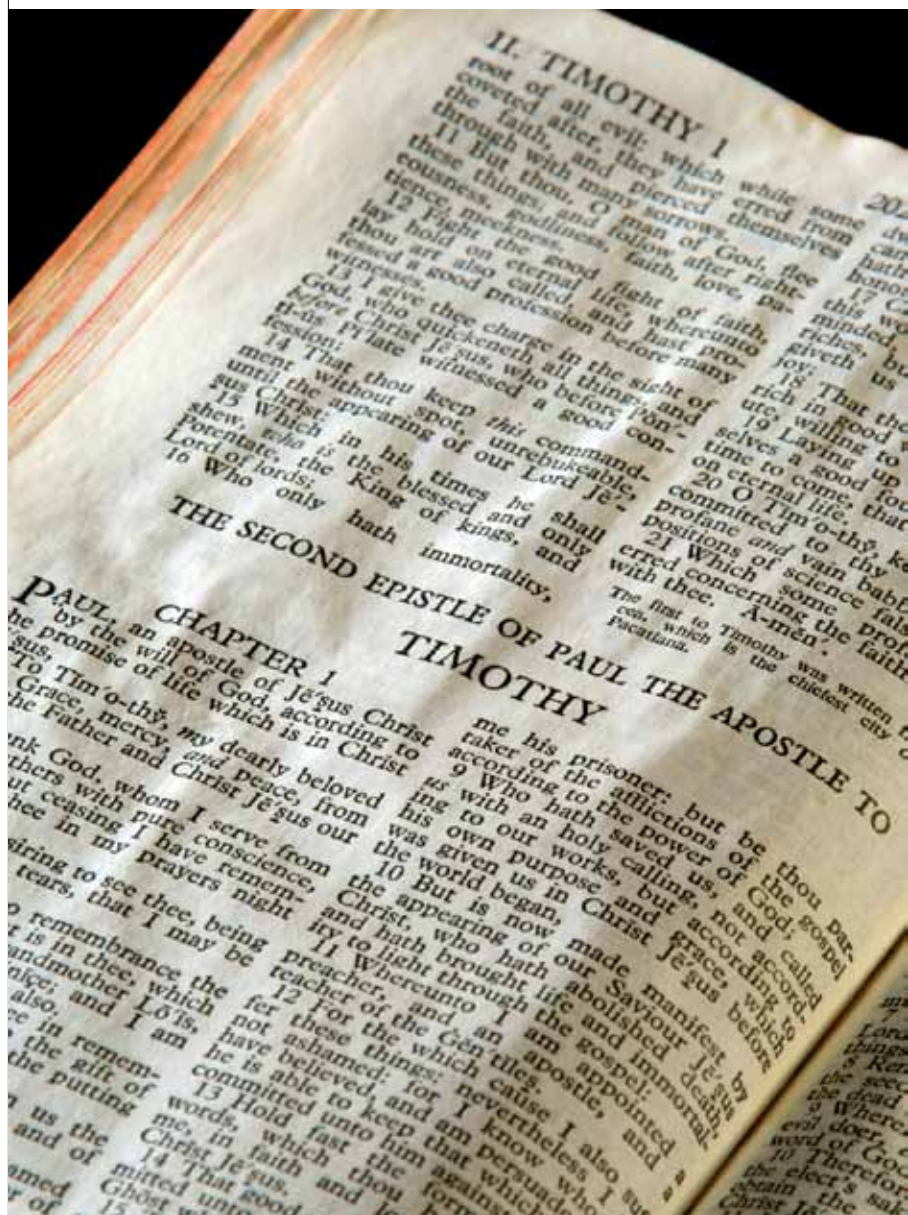
Paul does not say here what his opponents taught, but other ancient writings help us make an educated guess. Many Greeks thought that spirit is good and matter is bad, so a good God did not create the physical world. Rather, he created a lesser god, who created a yet lesser god, who created another, who created another, etc., in a long series of gradually less-good gods, one of whom was finally so far removed from perfection that he created the physical world, and human souls somehow got trapped in physical bodies.

Salvation was seen as the process of escaping matter, and it required a person to learn the genealogy of the gods and the way to navigate up through these levels in order to reach the original perfection. There was no evidence for these speculations, but they were attractive to some Christians in the first and second centuries. Paul's advice was simple: Have nothing to do with them.

by
Dr. Michael Morrison

Truth will prevail³

Paul describes the result such people were having in the early church: They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.



These smooth-talking salesmen were able to convince some women (sections of 1 Timothy seem to address the same problem), and even though the women learned all sorts of secret "knowledge", they never really learned anything useful. Their anxiety about their sins and desires made them easy prey for a philosophy that offered a way for them to work

their way out of the problem. The real truth is much simpler: Christ has done it for us; we do not need to be burdened with guilt or enslaved to our own desires.

Paul compares them to Egyptian magicians: Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth—men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. “Rejected” is too strong of a translation; the Greek word *adokimos* may also mean “incorrect” or “unapproved”. God has not totally rejected them, but we should reject them *as far as the faith is concerned*, that is, we reject what they teach.

But they will not get very far, Paul concludes, because, as in the case of those men (i.e., Jannes and Jambres), their folly will be clear to everyone. Paul does not tell us when or how (indeed, he says in verse 13 that the deceivers will soon get worse). His purpose is not to make a specific prediction, but to encourage Timothy to stick to the truth because eventually everyone will see that Timothy’s opponents are wrong.

Staying on track⁴

Paul reminds Timothy that he has a firm foundation: You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love... Timothy has heard the arguments, but Paul does not point him there. Rather, he points to the way in which Paul lived out the truth of the gospel. Paul’s own steadfastness is an important testimony to the validity of the message.

Not only did Paul have desirable qualities, he also had some undesirable experiences. Timothy knew about these, too: endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured.⁵ Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Paul writes this from prison, and expects death, so he knows that the Lord does not rescue His people from *all* situations. The point is that He *can*, and often has, so Timothy can be confident that the Lord will take care of him.

Timothy will experience some trouble, too: In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Indeed, it will sometimes look like the bad guys are winning: while evil men and impostors

¹ 2 Timothy 3:1–5

² Acts 2:16–17,
Hebrews 1:2

³ 2 Timothy 3:6–9

⁴ 2 Timothy
3:10–14

⁵ Acts 13–14

⁶ 2 Timothy
3:15–17

will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. Paul’s purpose here is not to make specific predictions—the purpose of this “battle rhetoric” is to steel Timothy for the hardships that will come. If he expects the worst, nothing will catch him off guard.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it. Elsewhere, Paul tells Timothy to keep the faith because it is true—but here he tells him to persevere because he knows the people who taught him. Some of the strongest evidence for the gospel is the example set by people who taught Timothy, especially Paul. If Paul can be faithful through persecutions and problems, Timothy can be, too.

The written word⁶

Timothy has another reason to be faithful: from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures—which for Timothy would be the Old Testament—which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Paul does not say *how* the Old Testament informs people about Jesus, but the book of Acts and several of Paul’s letters provide more than a hundred examples of how Paul used Scripture. The Old Testament describes our need for a Saviour, predicts salvation through a suffering Servant, and teaches that God is completely trustworthy.

All Scripture is God-breathed, Paul says. He does not say which books are in Scripture; nor does he specify how God breathed these writings. In context, Paul is talking about the Old Testament rather than the New, but the early church said the New Testament writings are inspired Scripture, just as the older writings are.

The important thing about inspiration is not the precise method used, but the purpose: It is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Scripture is not designed to teach us grammar, geography, maths or science. It has a more practical purpose: telling us about salvation through Christ, and after that, how we should live. We focus on those, rather than on speculations about the future. □

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No matter whose fault it is, we need to forgive our ex-spouse and move on. God will help us if we humbly come to Him for help and healing. If we jump into another relationship without a proper closure, then our unfinished hurt or grief will prevent each of us from developing an intimate relationship with our partner. It is like a wounded soldier who needs time to fully recover before he or she can be sent back to the ‘battle field’. Those who are in a blended family need an extra measure of love, grace, and patience to make the relationship work.

Conclusion

In a marital journey there are peaks and valleys. There are times when we have joy and there are times when we have sorrow as we go through trials. God in His wisdom has designed the marriage institution where we can grow spiritually and emotionally to become what He wants us to be eventually. The spirit of forgiveness is like a balm that soothes and heals

¹ Matthew 6:14–15

² Matthew 6:14–15

the wound in a marriage. Forgiveness is a gift that we have received from God through grace, and we want to extend that grace to forgive our mates and those who have wronged us.² As we go through life’s journey together with our mates, we constantly and mutually give forgiveness to each other and seek reconciliation. This is a sure way to mature and to achieve intimacy in marriage. □

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