

THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

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THE PLAIN TRUTH

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God is...

Millions worship God but they have no idea who He really is. Many believe God is like us, just more holy and more powerful. They project human experiences and ideas onto God and create gods in *their* own image.

What is the truth? This article explains, albeit briefly, who God is.

No matter how hard or how long we search we can *never* discover God on our own. God is *uncreated*, we are created. He is *infinite*, we are finite. He is *invisible*, we are visible. The only way we can know God is by His own self revelation. And that is precisely what God has done.

God has revealed Himself to us in the Person of Jesus Christ. There is no God apart from the one revealed in Jesus. Jesus is the full revelation and the exact image of God. If you have seen Jesus, you have seen God. To know God is to know Jesus. That is the *only way* you can know God.

God's word—the Holy Bible—reveals who God is. Jesus speaks to us through the Bible and His Spirit opens our minds to spiritual understanding.

So who is God?

God is a *community* of three persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. They are *distinct* from each other but operate as *one being*, not as three beings. They are *equally* God and are of one essence or substance. *They have their being in communion.*

Theirs is a shared life, not separate, independent lives. They dwell *in* each other, and therefore they know each other intimately. *Every action of theirs is a joint action*, not an individual action. Thus, there is perfect unity *within* the Triune God.

The Father is the *Lover*, the Son is the *Beloved*, and the Holy Spirit is the *Love*. The Father loves the Son and gives Himself totally to the Son, withholding nothing. Likewise, the Son loves the Father and gives Himself unreservedly to the Father, withholding nothing. Similarly, the Holy Spirit gives Himself totally to the Father and the Son. *The Father and the Son commune with each other in the Spirit which is the bond between them.*

The Holy Spirit is the 'go-between' God between the Father and the Son. The Spirit is God in procession giving the Father to the Son and giving the Son to the Father. The Spirit is the mutual love and bond of the Father and the Son (remember, the Holy Spirit dwells in both the Father and the Son). The Spirit is God giving

by
Dr. P.
Sellappan

God's self in love.

God is love. This refers to the love relationship they have *within* themselves. They express this love relationship in many ways such as:

a) Knowing and being known.¹ The Son knows the Father *as the Father's Son* (a *particular* Person, not a generic Father). The Father knows the Son *as the Son's Father* (a *particular* Person, not as a generic Son). Similarly the Holy Spirit knows the Father and Son *as the Holy Spirit*. *Love means knowing the one you love.* Jesus said, "I know my Father and my Father knows me."²

The Father is happy to be the Father of the Son, the Son is happy to be the Son of the Father, and the Holy Spirit is happy to be the Spirit of the Father and the Son. This is how they are *distinct*

from each other. They don't strive to be somebody else. For example, the Son doesn't seek to be the Father one day and neither does the Spirit seek to be the Son.

b) Giving and receiving. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit give themselves to each other freely. They don't withhold anything (unlike some parents/spouses who withhold something so that they can exercise control over their children/spouses). Their giving and receiving is dynamic—it never stops (unlike our giving which is usually intermittent and far apart).

c) Reciprocal glorifying. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit glorify each other. To glorify means to trust, affirm, adore, delight and accept. The Father glorifies the Son; the

Son glorifies the Father; and the Spirit glorifies the Father and the Son. They don't keep or hoard glory to themselves—they pass it on.

d) Dynamic unity of love. God's love is self-giving, other-centered—one that produces peace, joy, passion, delight and adoration. It is a dynamic unity of love that never ends—it goes on and on forever.³ It is this overflowing love that brought the creation into being.

The overflowing and abundant love relationship that the Triune God has *within* Himself is what He is offering humanity. That is why we are created and that is why we exist. God is inviting us to participate in *His* love relationship as His own beloved children. Would you say yes to His gracious offer? □



¹ 1 Corinthians 13:12

² John 10:15

³ 1 Corinthians 13:8

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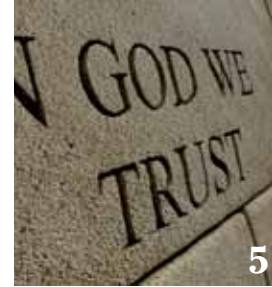
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Something to think about.

What our readers say:

Some of the ideas in your magazine are radical and it makes me think hard about my beliefs. Even though I disagree with some of your 'truth', it does provide me with some insight and encourages me to seek the truth.

Donatus Justin Keningau

Ed.: Thank you for your comment and your desire to seek the truth. You are perfectly entitled to disagree with what we say. We try to present the Good News as accurately as possible and give some scripture references so that our readers can check them out if what we say is true.

The Sept.-Nov. 2010 issue is an excellent one. The cover design is impressive and so are all the articles. The articles are well-written and explain clearly the purpose of human life. I especially liked the cover story "We are always in His mind" by Joseph Tkach and "Free to live" by Mak Chew Yeng. They explain clearly God's unconditional love and how humanity will transition from its bondage (likened to the caterpillar's dark days in the cocoon) to liberty (likened to the butterfly's dance to freedom). As always, the quotes in Hmm... give us some something to ponder. Keep up the good work and God bless you all!

Jaya Damansara Utama

You seem to be proclaiming a message that is far fetched, unrealistic and too good to be true! Is it really true? Is it going to happen? Or is it just a pipe dream to make people who are burdened and stressed happy?

PS Petaling Jaya

Ed.: Good questions. The message that we proclaim appears to be a fairy tale, but it's not. It is the Good News of Jesus Christ who has come to redeem the entire creation (including all human beings) so that we can participate in God's abundant life as His beloved children. It is going to happen not because of superior human effort, but because of God's great love for His creation. And we don't have to wait for that life to come; it is available now for those who want it.

THE PLAIN TRUTH has increased my Bible knowledge. The articles are well-written

and uplifting. It is a good Christian magazine for those who truly want to know God.

Lily T Y Yong Kudat

The articles are enlightening and challenging. Thank you for your commitment towards producing a Christ-centered publication! You will only know the results when Jesus returns again. God bless you!

Mark Kosinski Melaka

THE PLAIN TRUTH has opened my eyes and mind to see and understand the many wonderful things in the Bible. I'm encouraged to spend more time reading God's word as my understanding has improved with the help of THE PLAIN TRUTH.

Yong Thiam Siew Petaling Jaya

The stories and quotes are marvellous. It helps me to strengthen my relationship with God. I never fail to enjoy reading it.

Clarence Ying Singapore

THE PLAIN TRUTH is thought-provoking and educational. It provides me great solace and encourages me in time of stress.

Lee Wai Kok Singapore

First of all, I would like to congratulate the team for the wonderful magazine. I would also like to sincerely thank all of you for sharing the magazine that has changed my life and the lives of my family. It has helped us to understand God's word better.

Ho Nee Yong Kulim

THE PLAIN TRUTH has enlightened me on many issues. It has also brought me out from the tunnel of ignorance into the Lord's love, grace and compassion. Thanks for a really great magazine. Enclosed is my contribution towards the furtherance of your mission in God's work.

Chia Thien Soon Kemaman

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me to be aware of God's goodness and His plan for mankind.

I used to send donations but I am sorry I cannot send now due to my current financial problems, but I will as soon as I get a job. Thank you for your mission!

Chua Fui Foong Sandakan

I find the articles very enriching. It has helped me to grow in my faith and also helps me to be more aware of the happenings around me. I have banked in RM50.00 into your account—a small contribution towards the good work that you all are doing.

Jessie Nathan Ipoh

THE PLAIN TRUTH is very inspirational reading. Thanks a million.

Syra George Mokunjil Sandakan

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 3 or sent electronically to the bank account:

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We welcome your comments. Letters for this section should be addressed to: "Letters to the Editor", The Plain Truth, P.O. Box 2043, Pusat Bisnes Bukit Raja, Pos Malaysia Bhd., 40800 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia. or sent via electronic mail to: ptasia@myjaring.net 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.

Believing the Gospel

Many Christians are afraid of the gospel. We are afraid of the gospel because it is too good. Many of us are more comfortable with *religion* than we are with the *gospel*. We prefer to read the Bible as a divine rulebook that guards the entrance to the kingdom than to read it as God's witness to His redemption of the whole cosmos through His Son.

We prefer to think that when God breathed the life of His Word into the Bible, He was merely creating a religion—a divine formula to show humans what things to do and not to do in order to get on God's good side and stay there.

But the gospel is not a new and improved religion. The gospel is an affront to religion. It is the end of religion, the end of all systems of works designed to make us acceptable to God. The gospel, by contrast, tells us that God Himself has already, through Jesus Christ, made us acceptable. The gospel is good news; religion is bad news; and the gospel wins. Christ is victorious. Sin is vanquished.

We are overcomers only in Christ, not in *our* overcoming anything. We are sinners, always have been and will continue to be to the day we die. Whatever we may have overcome is like removing a spoonful of sand from the beach. Unless and until we are found in Christ, we remain dead in our sins. And we are found in Christ only by trusting Him to be for us who He says He is and to do for us what He says He does. Only when we trust Him will we accept His gift of mercy and life, and only when we wake up to our sinfulness will we trust Him.

As long as we think we are "doing OK", or that we "aren't all that bad" or that we are "making progress" or even that we will never be "good enough", we will not trust Him. All such thinking is trusting not Him, but ourselves. It is thinking that His acceptance of us is based on how well we behave. It is thinking that if we do better, then He will accept us, or conversely, that He accepts us because we have been overcoming.

God accepts us because He wants to accept us, and not because we have measured up. God dealt with our sin by the blood of Christ, not by giving us a new and improved law code. We are justified because God justified us Himself, personally, through His Son. God did for us in Christ what we could not do for ourselves, and He calls on us to trust *Him* to be our righteousness.¹

That means we do not have righteousness. It is not



by
**Dr. Michael
Fezell**

just a matter that we "have got some problems". It is not just a matter that we have "a few things to overcome". It is not even a matter of "putting sin out of our lives". It is a matter of understanding that we are hopeless losers, sinners through and through, and that even our "good" deeds are thoroughly laced with selfish impurity. Until we see that, until we see ourselves for what we really are, we will not trust Him who alone saves sinners.

Fear of the gospel

Many Christians are afraid of the gospel because it puts everybody on the same level—"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."² That means we, being sinners ourselves, have no ground to feel spiritually superior to people who do things that disgust and

offend us. Others are afraid of the gospel because the gospel requires them to believe that God will save them in spite of their sins. We have a hard time trusting God to do exactly what He promised to do—forgive us our sins.

We want to prove to Him we can "do it". We want to show Him we'll be faithful, that we will be obedient, that we will be "good Christians". But the truth is, we won't be. We will sin, and we will sin again, and again. And until we believe the gospel, instead of some fairy tale about having to please God before He will accept us, we will not enter God's rest. God saves us; changes in our behaviour do not.

We can live in misery, struggling to be found worthy by perfect obedience and constantly failing and fearing that God is waiting to squash us like flies, or we can trust His Word. (Or even worse, we can live in appalling arrogance, actually believing that we are worthy

obeying God and trusting Him to accept us for our "holy deeds".)

God is our salvation; our improved behaviour is not. To repent is to turn to God and away from ourselves. It is to concede that we are sinners and that we need God's mercy. It is to trust God to be faithful to His word of grace spoken in His Son before the world began. It is to remove our little homemade crown and hand it over to our Maker, the author of eternal salvation.

God is our righteousness; our illusion of good behaviour is not. When we come to see our righteousness as filthy rags, as indeed it is, then we can begin to see our need for God's grace and mercy. When we believe His word of salvation in His Son, then we can begin to trust Him to forgive all our sins and save us.

*“God is our salvation;
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is not. To repent is to
turn to God and away
from ourselves. It is to
concede that we are
sinners and that we
need God’s mercy.”*

Trusting God

Why is it so hard to trust God to forgive us and to make us His perfectly righteous children in Christ? Perhaps one reason is because we can't stand to think of ourselves as, or to think that others might think of us as, bald-faced sinners. We prefer the façade of pretending to be good, decent folks. But we are not good, decent folks. Nobody is good, decent folks. At best, we are less destructive and wicked than we could be if we let ourselves go entirely.

Have you ever noticed that if you behave decently for a day or two, you begin to feel like you are a pretty

to see more clearly that in spite of our sin, we can rest in the atonement of Christ, for our sins are forgiven in Him. The reason we need a Saviour is because we need saving. The gospel declares that God has indeed saved us through Christ. In fact, Christ died for us ungodly people while we were still sinners.³

Now please don't tell me that we "were" sinners, but now we are not to be sinners anymore. Please drop the rhetoric. We *are* sinners. We *do* still sin after conversion. Every Christian who ever lived continues to sin after conversion. That doesn't make sin OK. It doesn't condone sin. It is simply a fact, and one we would all



good person after all? And conversely, if your natural self gets loose for a few minutes and you behave like the ratbag you are, then you feel depressed, disappointed and frustrated that you are not as grand as you had been imagining?

But what is there to be disappointed about? Why, given what you are, were you expecting not to behave accordingly from time to time? Our disappointment ought to be in our failure to honour the God of our salvation, not in our failure to look impeccable to ourselves and others. If it were, then we would be free

do much better to just admit and quit pretending that if we try hard enough we will become sinless.

There is one way, of course, in which we are not sinners. As believers we are in Christ, and as such we are not sinners in the sense that God does not count our sins against us.⁴ In other words, when we do not pretend that we are not sinners, but instead put our trust in Jesus Christ who saves sinners, God does not count our sins against us.⁵

Overcomers

What must we do about sin? We must trust God to forgive our sins. We must *trust Him!* He is our only hope. We are sinners, and unless God forgives our sins, we come under the condemnation all sinners deserve. We are not going to stop being sinners. I'm sure you have tried, like I have, and discovered that despite occasional bouts of improvement, sin is still alive and well in your life. But God says that if we trust Him *He* will take care of our sins and *He* will count us righteous *in Christ* who, *for our sakes*, became the perfect human.

The Bible is not a rulebook for new and improved religion. It is the Word of God, God's chosen revelation of Himself to us, declaring to us that in Jesus Christ He has dealt with the sins of the world so that whoever trusts Him will be saved. That is good news. It is the gospel. It is not religion. Don't be afraid of it.

I know. You're still waiting for me to say something about the importance of behaving right. But I'm not going to. At least not in the way you are probably used to. We are overcomers in Christ alone; when it comes to godly overcoming, there is no other way to be an overcomer.

When you trust Christ to be your righteousness, your behaviour will be set by the Holy Spirit on the road to improvement, regardless of whether you constantly set "overcoming goals" for yourself. But if you try to improve your behaviour without trusting Christ to be your only righteousness, you may or may not be successful, and whether or not you are won't make a hill of beans of difference in terms of your standing with God.

In other words, salvation is not based on what you do; it is based on what God has already done. When you trust God, you are in Christ, and when you are in Christ, God does not count your sins against you. If you do not trust God, you are still in your sins, because you are not in Christ.

Priorities

Here's a gospel tip: don't make behaving better your main goal in life. If you do, you'll always be frustrated, disappointed in yourself and miserable, not to mention a judgmental and obnoxious prig. You're welcome to it if you want it, of course. But will-powering yourself into a better you is a no-win life goal. Will-power goodness is the root of religion; it has no place in the gospel.

Instead, make your main goal in life knowing and trusting in the Lord your God for absolutely everything, including your behaviour. When you do that, your preoccupation with yourself and how good you are will fade, and your eyes will begin to open to the righteousness of God and the joy and peace of His

kingdom. The Holy Spirit will reorder your priorities, and the pain your sins naturally cause in your life will more readily drive you to God for mercy and help to overcome.

Let me say it another way: Work on yourself and make every effort to change for the better—but *not because you think it will make you less a sinner and get you in good terms with God*. Take overcoming seriously. Do it because God wants you to, because Jesus Christ gave you a new life, because it is right, because everybody who loves you wants you to, and because it will make your life much more blessed, rewarding, peaceful and pleasant. But don't do it because you think that's how you will get into the kingdom of God. It isn't.

Regardless of how much you improve (and you need a *lot* of improvement—I know you; you're just like me), you are still a sinner, and the only hope of salvation

you've got is the mercy of God along with His word that in Christ He extends it to you. Trust *Him*, not your good life, when it comes to salvation. When it comes to salvation, trust the word of God that in Christ it is a *fait accompli*; when it comes to behaviour, trust yourself to the supervision of the Holy Spirit and put your heart into overcoming.

Don't think that good behaviour results in salvation; but know that salvation results in good behaviour. But don't let that make you think that poor behaviour equals unsaved and good behaviour equals saved. It simply does not work that way; don't forget that we all still sin. Sin involves not merely acts but attitudes, and God knows even the deepest secrets of our hearts.

Rest in this: God loves you; He's proven it in Christ, and He will make you into what

He wants you to be. You can trust Him to do it. Get to know Him. Spend time with Him. Put your confidence in Him. Make Him the priority in your life, and you will begin to find His love influencing the way you live in the world and the way you interact with others.

Whether we experience hardship or ease, prosperity or poverty, bad times or good times (and Christians experience them all), our ability to cope with what comes our way will depend on our trust in God. But all the while, because we are in Christ, our salvation is not in question. We are saved by God's grace through faith, and even our faith is God's gracious gift to us.

Remember, the gospel is good news. It is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."⁶ Therefore, as Hebrews 10:23 encourages us, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful." □



¹ 1 Corinthians 1:30

² Romans 3:23

³ Romans 5:8

⁴ Romans 4:8

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:15

⁶ Romans 1:16

The powerful gift of encouragement

One day a school teacher asked everyone in her class to write down each of the other students' names and note the nicest thing they could say about each person.

Years later, the teacher heard that one of the students had died in Vietnam and she was asked to attend his funeral. The family showed her the piece of paper from school with other students' kind remarks about him that had been carried in his wallet until the day he died. Other students told the teacher that they had also saved their pieces of paper from that day and how much it had meant to them.

This true story from Minnesota demonstrates how powerful words of encouragement and appreciation can be.

Life changing

"That dress really looks great on you!"; "You're such a reliable person!"; "I admire the way you handled that situation!"—compliments like this can make your heart sing and give you a lift for the rest of the day. A well placed compliment can even change the course of someone's life.

Few rags-to-riches stories are as compelling as that of Enrico Caruso (1873–1921). The youngest of 21 children, only 3 of whom survived infancy, Caruso was born into grinding poverty. He longed to be an opera singer, but his first teacher told him he was no good. His mother, however, praised him and told him she knew he could sing, and went barefoot in order to save money to pay for his music lessons. By the end of his life, Caruso had become the highest paid singer in the world and is generally acknowledged as one of the greatest operatic tenors ever.

It is likely that you still remember compliments you received even many years ago. Everyone enjoys being appreciated. Indeed, all of us *hunger* for encouragement.

"The deepest principle in human nature is the craving to be appreciated," concluded American philosopher William James. Mark Twain quipped, "I can live for two

by
Rex Morgan

months on a good compliment."

Charles Dickens (1812–1870) had a very difficult childhood. His father spent time in a debtors' prison, and Charles was unable to attend school for more than four years. While working in a rat-infested warehouse, Charles mailed his first manuscript at night-time so no one would laugh at him. After many failures, at last a manuscript was accepted. Although he wasn't paid for the work, the fact that one editor had recognised him was so thrilling that he kept working, and became one of the most prodigious authors in history.

The physician George Adam said that encouragement is like "oxygen to the soul". An old Japanese proverb

declares: "One kind word can warm up three winter months." The Bible states that "Kind words are like honey, sweet to the soul and healthy for the body."¹

All of us thrive on encouragement, but on the other hand, no one likes to be criticised. Criticism stings, and often leaves a scar.

Conditioned to criticise

What a pity it is then that so many people are criticised so

often, and sometimes encouragement is a remarkably scarce commodity. It is easy to laugh at other people's ideas, to pick holes in their arguments, and put people down. We seem to be conditioned to be quick to criticise and slow to find words of praise. Even if we notice something good about others, we avoid mentioning it to them. Our innate human selfishness often leads us to downplay the achievements of others lest they show us in a bad light.

Often it takes a little thought to find ways to build others up. But really, it isn't all that hard to give appreciation and encouragement. It doesn't cost anything, other than a bit of self-effacement, yet it is worth so much.

Did you realise that you possess a great power that can change other people's lives for the better, and at the same time cause them to like you more? Yes, you



do—the power of encouragement!

The famous US steel magnate Charles Schwab said, “The way to develop the best that is in a man is by appreciation and encouragement. There is nothing else that so kills the ambitions of a man as criticism from his superiors. I believe in giving a man incentive to work. So I am anxious to praise but loathe to find fault. If I like anything, I am hearty in my approbation and lavish in my praise.”

Animal trainers know that the key to improved performance in their charges is to use “positive reinforcement”, praising and rewarding them instantly for good behaviour. It’s a sad fact of life that while we are quick to praise animals in order to cause improvement, when it comes to other humans, we criticise and condemn rather than praise the efforts we notice.

Another sad reality is that the main people we criticise, insult for their trivial faults and say unkind things to are those in our families. Why can’t we bring more appreciation, and with it more happiness, into our homes?

When was the last time you brought your wife flowers and told her you loved and appreciated her? It can work wonders! When was the last time you told your husband you were glad you married him? How often do you praise and appreciate your workmates, and your children?

Working with children

Encouragement is particularly valuable for children. As they grow, they need to hear frequent validation so that they can develop a balanced and healthy sense of self-worth, to replace the inferiority feelings they often have. Their inexperience causes them to make mistakes, and these can too often be criticised and punished. They are constantly searching for acceptance and approval. We need to give them encouragement and hope, or they will find inappropriate ways to gain attention and support.

If your children don’t listen to you, try praising them for something. Express admiration for their handwriting, toys, clothing, drawing—anything you can say some positive words about—and see how they start listening attentively!

Here’s a little tip to help increase your

“encouragement index”. How about putting some coins or buttons in one pocket and transferring one of them to the other pocket each time you encourage your child. The goal is to move all of the coins from one pocket to the other by the end of the day.

Words of appreciation and encouragement can work wonders. They produce results where criticism and ridicule fail. No wonder the Apostle Paul urged his followers, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up.”²

Even the highest achievers and the most apparently positive thinkers suffer from doubts and fears. A professional hockey goalie once lamented, “How would you like a job where, when you make a mistake, a big red light flashes, a buzzer sounds and 20,000 fans

boo!”

In their book, *Becoming a Person of Influence*, John Maxwell and Jim Dornan noted an experiment that measured people’s capacity to endure pain. “Psychologists measured how long a barefooted person could stand in a bucket of ice water,” they write. They found that one factor made it possible for some people to stand in the ice water for twice as long as others. Can you guess what that factor was? It was encouragement. When another person was present, giving support and encouragement, the sufferers were able to endure the pain much longer than their unencouraged counterparts.³

Bringing out the best

Praise brings out the best in people.

Has the word ever gotten back to you that someone thinks you are intelligent? The next time you’re around that person, you certainly don’t want to do anything to dispel the illusion. We tend to live up to the way we think others see us.

The celebrated German writer Goethe put it this way: “Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them to become what they are capable of being.”

The Duke of Wellington, the British military leader who defeated Napoleon at Waterloo, was not an easy man to serve under. He was brilliant, demanding, and

Tips for giving encouragement:

Be sincere: Don’t say it if you don’t mean it. People see right through flattery.

Be specific: It’s nice to say “Well done”, but it’s much more effective to explain exactly what part of the job was well done.

Don’t delay: Say it when you think it—or the opportunity may be lost for good.

Do it in public: Praising people in front of others adds to the impact.

Put it in writing: Thank You cards or encouraging notes can be looked at often, and kept forever. There are people who keep a file of every complimentary note they’ve ever received. Surely that says something about the power of encouragement!

¹ Proverbs 16:24

² 1 Thessalonians 5:11

³ Maxwell, John C. and Dornan, Jim. *Becoming a Person of Influence*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006.

continued on page 11

The miracle workers

My favourite movie of all time is *The Miracle Worker*, the story of blind, deaf Helen Keller and her teacher, Annie Sullivan, whose love and patience taught Helen to read and speak. My favourite scene is the moment at the well where Helen suddenly grasps the link between symbols and objects. Today I was able to visit the place where the miracle happened.

Helen Keller was born in this quiet northern Alabama town. When she was 18 months old, she suffered an illness that left her blind and deaf. She grew up in a world of total darkness and silence. The little girl was



by
John Halford

her own words in her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*:

“We walked down the path to the well-house, attracted by the fragrance of the honeysuckle with which it was covered. Someone was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand, she spelled into the other the word *water*, first slowly and then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers.

Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow



intelligent, but unable to communicate or respond in any meaningful way.

Eventually her desperate parents hired a teacher and governess, Annie Sullivan. Annie took up the challenge of trying to reach through to the half-wild little girl. Helen would seem to enjoy it as Annie would allow her to feel objects, then, using a special finger alphabet, spell out the name of the object into her hand. But it was an exercise in frustration and futility. Helen could not make the connection.

Then one day the miracle happened. Helen tells it in

the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy and set it free!”

Helen’s dark and silent world suddenly exploded into a new life. She learned 30 new words that day, and then in the next few weeks hundreds more. Helen went on to graduate with honours from Radcliffe College, and until she died in 1968, travelled the world as source of hope and inspiration to all she met. It all began that

day at the well with a dedicated and loving teacher who loved her and believed in her potential.

Helen Keller's home has been preserved. The well pump is still there, although it is now covered with a protective roof instead of honeysuckle. Standing by the pump I tried to imagine the feeling of freedom and joy Helen experienced when she suddenly grasped language and her life was transformed. And it occurred to me that I, and probably you, have had a similar experience.

The hour I first believed

I can vividly recall the time and place when I first really understood that Jesus loves me, redeemed me and will never leave me. I had heard He was my Saviour all my life, but it was just another religious cliché. I was born into a Protestant family, and we later became Catholic, but when I was in my teens I abandoned it all. I became interested in Christianity again when I was 20, and was rebaptised. But looking back I realise that, even though I was sincere, I still had not really understood what it meant. Then one day, after working late, as I was praying in the photographic darkroom of the print shop where I worked, it hit me. Like Helen, I suddenly saw the connection between the symbol and the reality. Why then? Why there? I don't know.

I suspect that many people reading this can also remember a similar moment when it "came together", and we suddenly knew we had a Saviour. For the apostle Paul, it was on the road to Damascus. For "Doubting Thomas" it was a face-to-face encounter with Jesus after Jesus was resurrected. For the thief on the cross it was the agonising moments before death. For me it was while praying in a darkroom. For you...?

As my understanding of Christianity has developed, I have come to appreciate that Jesus is not only my Saviour but the Saviour of all humankind. He came to bring the sights and sounds of salvation to a spiritually blind and deaf world. He said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to Myself."¹

Jesus isn't *trying to* reconcile the world to God; He's already done it. Our God—Father, Son and Spirit—is one God who dwells in an eternal communion of love, and He has passed on that connectedness to the whole creation, and most especially to us humans. More than that, the Son of God actually *became one of us*, permanently identifying with us and sharing with us His own perfect relationship of love with the Father. "For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself." Paul wrote in Colossians 1:19–20.

This surely affects how we look at our fellow human beings. They're not outsiders, they're insiders who don't

know it yet, brothers and sisters whom He is drawing to Himself just as He said He would.

We religious people are very good at pigeonholing others. "Saved and unsaved", "righteous and unrighteous", "insiders and outsiders", and even "our church" and "their church". But the truth is, we are all in the same boat—lost, blind and deaf until the Son of God took up our cause and "the Light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it."²

Every human is somewhere along that path of being drawn home to Christ. Some of us, thank God, have already had our eyes and ears opened, and Jesus wants us not to sit in judgment of those still on the path, but rather to share in His work of bringing them home too.

Annie Sullivan yearned to bring the light of human contact, communication and friendship into Helen Keller's darkness. She could not force her mind open. But by months of persistent, unconditional love she built a relationship of trust and became the agent through which the miracle could happen.

Helen Keller was a devout Christian. Later in life, looking back on her years of silence and darkness, she wrote, "I always knew [God] was there. I just did not know His name."

For many people, the connection between life and Jesus has not yet dawned. But God is both patient and relentless in His undying love. He never forces anyone to receive it, for then it would not be love, but He won't give up on even the most stubborn holdouts because even they belong to Jesus.

God has given us, those who already believe, the blessing of joining Him in our small way in His ongoing work of making His good news known. After all, God created us to stick together in love—to love one another just as Christ loves us and gave Himself for us. By that love, Jesus said, others will know that we belong to Him.³ God's gift of faith and salvation is a miracle—a miracle He wants us first to receive and then to live and tell others about. Sometimes it might seem we aren't getting anywhere. That is why we need to encourage, support and inspire one another—and along the way learn something about what it means to live together in Christ in loving communion.

THE PLAIN TRUTH is devoted to helping the process in its small way by being a place where we share our stories, our faith and our hope as the Holy Spirit leads us into knowing our Saviour and our Father ever more deeply. Just as the water from the pump triggered a new life for Helen Keller, so the water of the Word triggers a new life for all who receive it. □

¹ John 12:32

² John 1:5

³ John 13:35

continued from page 9

not one to shower his subordinates with compliments. Yet even Wellington realised that his methods left something to be desired. In his old age a young lady asked him what, if anything, he would do differently if he had his life to live over again. Wellington thought for a moment then replied, "I'd give more praise."

Praise and encouragement is a wonderful gift to give. It is free, requires no shopping and no shipping, doesn't have to be gift-wrapped, doesn't require batteries—yet it is worth a fortune, and can last a lifetime. When

you give it away you don't lose anything. You are able to give it again and again—and no one ever gets too much of it. Another great benefit is that you feel much better yourself after giving it. So there's no need to be stingy about it.

Why withhold something that is so precious, so available, and so potent? Give the powerful gift of encouragement often! □

Get a n

Millions today live *subhuman* lives. Besides making money to provide for their families and pursuing fleeting pleasures, they have no real purpose in life. So they live purposeless lives instead of the abundant life that God offers them. If you are one of them, don't despair! You *can* get a brand new life!

This article explains how you can receive a new life—the *new life in Christ*. We will present it in four parts:

1. Jesus' union/unity with the Father
2. Jesus' participation in His relationship with the Father
3. Our union with Christ
4. Our participation in Christ's relationship with the Father

But before we go into it, let's first emphasise here that we are referring to *the resurrected and ascended human Jesus*, and not the divine Son.

Jesus' unity/union with the Father

The Father and Son (*the human Jesus*) [and the Holy Spirit] are *one being, not two* [three] *beings*. They are *in* each other and are of *one* heart and one mind. They are always in total agreement.

Jesus said, "I and My Father are *one*."¹ He also said, "...don't you believe that *I am in the Father*, and that the *Father is in Me*? The words I say to you are not just My own. It is the Father, *living in Me*, who is doing His work. Believe Me when I say that *I am in the Father and the Father is in Me*..."²

Jesus' participation in His relationship with the Father

There is a dynamic relationship (fellowship, participation) going on between the Father and Son. They participate *as one being* in everything they do. For example, Jesus said, "My Father has been *working* until now, and I have been *working*."³

Every act of God (creation, salvation, etc) is the act of the Father and Son (in the Spirit). There is no division of labour as in a factory. Every act is by the Father and Son but one may take the lead. *Their life and work are inseparable*.

Take creation for example. When the Father *created* the earth, the Son and Spirit were involved. Similarly, when Jesus was *baptised*, the Father and Spirit were involved.⁴

Jesus confessed, "...the Son can do *nothing* of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner."⁵ He continued, "...whatever I *speak*, just as the Father has *told Me*, so I speak."⁶ They speak with one voice and as one being.

All their working, speaking, doing, baptising and creating are done as one being.

The Father-Son relationship is a dynamic one. The



by
**Dr. P.
Sellappan**

Father and Son commune with each other in the Spirit. Theirs is a holy, righteous relationship. When we say God is *holy (righteous)* we are referring to the *wholesome (right)* relationship they have with each other in the Spirit.

Now let's talk about *our* union with Jesus and *our* participation in Jesus' relationship with the Father



(parts 3 and 4).

Our union with Jesus

The Father-Son (*the human Jesus*) union is a perfect one. But how does that union help us? The answer is Jesus includes us in His union with the Father. Jesus prayed, "...I pray also for those who will *believe in Me*

ew life!

through their message, that *all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in Us...* I have given them the glory that You gave Me, that they may be one as We are one: *I in them and you in Me. May they be brought to complete unity... I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love You have for Me*



may be in them and that I Myself may be in them."⁷ He continued, "Keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are."⁸

What is the quality of our union with Christ? Our union with Christ is complete, intimate and tight-knit like that of the Father-Son union. Nothing is overlooked. It includes our justification, sanctification and glorification. Jesus

justified us by His death on the cross, He sanctified us in His ascended humanity, and He glorified us by passing His glory that He received from His Father to us.

Jesus died and paid the death penalty that we deserved. That's not all. He also *assumed* our fallen nature, *overcame and recreated it for us* (see the "spiritual makeover" article in the April-June 2010 issue) as a *human being* in the power of the Holy Spirit and *not* as a divine Son. He did it *for us* from *within* our humanity.

God is not asking us to work hard and attain the perfect unity that Jesus has with His Father. It is simply impossible to achieve! Rather, God is asking us to participate in Jesus' union and relationship with His Father which He has already worked out for us as a human being in our place and on our behalf and has given it to us freely by grace.

Theologian John Calvin called it *the Great Exchange*. Jesus exchanged place with us. *He exchanged our fallen humanity with His worked-out perfect humanity.* That means, in Christ, we are *already perfect*. We are indeed a *new creation, recreated in the image of God. Jesus came as the second Adam and reshaped us into God's image from within our humanity as a fellow human being.* We are called to simply believe that it is so, and live our new lives in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. *This is the only reality there is.*

The two *sacraments*—baptism and communion—picture this reality beautifully. Jesus *repented and was baptized for us—perfectly.* He was *buried* in the water *for us* and we were buried with Him. He was raised from the water *for us* and we rose with Him as new man. That is how we died and rose. *We don't get new life by overcoming our sin (important as it is).*

Baptism is a one-time event. Communion, on the other hand, is an ongoing activity—that's why we take it often. Communion pictures our intimate relationship (fellowship) with *the ascended Christ. The human Jesus is truly "the bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh" and He cleaves to us and we cleave to Him "as one flesh".* That's why Jesus told His disciples: "...unless you eat of my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in you."⁹ *Jesus is our perfect humanity. He has worked that out for us from within our humanity as a fellow human being and has given it to us freely by grace.*

How are we united to Christ? We are united to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. *The Spirit unites us to Jesus and Jesus to us. This union is of the same quality as the Father-Son union, nothing less. The Spirit works out in us what Jesus has already accomplished for us.*

Our union with Christ applies to all aspects of salvation—*justification, sanctification and glorification.* Jesus didn't justify us and leave us to work out our sanctification by diligent overcoming. *No, the Holy Spirit works out in us the sanctification that Jesus has already attained for us in His perfect ascended humanity.* The same goes for glorification. Jesus received glory

from His Father and has passed it on to us, and we pass it on to others.

Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. *As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.* And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that *they also may be sanctified by the truth.*”¹⁰

Similarly, Jesus prayed, “...*I have given them the glory that you gave me*, that they may be one as we are one: *I in them* and you in me. May they be brought to *complete unity* to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”¹¹ St. Paul and St. John too echo the same thought.¹²

Our union with Christ doesn't mean that we have no individual identities. No, everyone will be distinct—you will be you and I will be me. Everyone is invited to participate in Christ's relationship with His Father as a *unique* individual. Joe will participate as Joe (and not as someone else) and Mary will participate as Mary. When all our individual relationships are combined, they form a beautiful, multi-coloured relationship tapestry.

We are children of God now, so we must live as children of God. We are no longer sinners—that is our true reality. That is how *God sees us, not how we see or feel about ourselves.* We are indeed a reconciled, redeemed and adopted community. We belong to God and we live our new lives *in Jesus' perfect humanity.*

But it doesn't appear to be so, does it? Why? Because we are *hidden* in Christ. *Hidden means we cannot see it*, but we will when Jesus is revealed to us at His second coming. So until then we wait patiently while actively participating in our new life in Christ. We live, move and have our being in Him *moment by moment.*

St. Paul declares, “*For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.* When Christ, who is your life, appears, then *you also will appear with Him in glory.*”¹³

Our participation in Jesus' relationship with His Father

God gives us the perfect relationship that Jesus (*the human Jesus*) has with His Father. Jesus has *already* worked out that relationship for us as a fellow human being. Our union with Jesus gives us the privilege to participate in His perfect relationship with the Father.

Participating in Christ's ascended human life is the key. Jesus has received all power and authority to carry out the Great Commission—to preach the Gospel, baptize, teach and make disciples. Jesus doesn't need our help to do that. But He gives us the wonderful privilege to participate in what He is doing. Why? Because that is what we will be doing for all eternity—*participating in His vicarious humanity* using our individual gifts and talents. The Bible gives us many examples:

- At the wedding party in Cana, when the wine ran out, at the request of His mother Mary, Jesus asked the servants to fill the jars with water and He changed the water into wine. He could have performed that miracle by Himself without their help, but He chose to include them in His ministry.¹⁴
- On two occasions, Jesus prayed over meagre amounts of food and fed thousands. He didn't do all by Himself. He included His disciples who distributed the food.¹⁵
- On another occasion, Jesus sent His disciples to go to every city *where He Himself was about to*

go. They preached the gospel, healed the sick and drove out demons.¹⁶ Jesus included them in His ministry.

- The Holy Spirit told evangelist Philip to go and minister to a high-ranking Ethiopian eunuch who was returning from Jerusalem after worship. Jesus could have ministered to him personally, but He let Philip do it.¹⁷

Today, Jesus tells His church to go and preach the gospel and baptize and make disciples. He could do without our assistance but He has chosen to include us in His ministry.¹⁸

We share in Jesus' relationship with His Father

St. Paul writes, “I have been crucified with Christ; *it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.*”¹⁹ We too echo the same thing in our new life in Christ. For example:

- *Work.* Jesus said, “My Father is always at His work to this very day, and I, too, am working.”²⁰ The Father gives work to Jesus and we participate in it. So we say, “I work, yet not I, but Christ works in me.”
- *Glory.* Jesus said, “And the glory which You gave Me I have given them.”²¹ The Father gives glory to Jesus and He shares it with us. So we say, “I give glory, yet not I, but Christ in me gives it.”
- *Word.* Similarly, the Father gives the word to Jesus²² and He asks us to go and share it with others. So we say, “I preach, yet not I, but Christ in me does it.”
- *Authority.* The Father gives authority to the Son and He shares it with us. So we say, “I perform miracles, yet not I, but Christ in me does it.”
- *Joy.* Jesus said, “*My joy* may remain in you, and *that your joy* may be full.”²³ So we say, “I have joy, yet not mine, it is Christ's.”
- *Peace.* Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.”²⁴ So we say, “I have peace, yet not mine, it is Christ's.”
- *Faith.* Similarly, we say “I have faith, yet not my faith, it is Christ's.”
- *Worship.* Similarly, we say “I worship, yet not I, but Christ in me worships.”

Come get this new life

Our new life in Christ is more than wearing the label ‘Christian’, getting a financial windfall or getting a degree from an ivy university. It is more than marrying your darling sweetheart or receiving a newborn bundle of joy.

Our new life in Christ is infinitely more glorious than what you could ever imagine. Spiritually speaking, Jesus is “bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh”. We cleave unto Him and He cleaves unto us and we become “one flesh” with Him. In our resurrected and glorified life we will be *one* with Christ just as Christ and the Father are one. Our union with Christ will not be “until death do us apart”—it will be forever. So why wait? Come get this new life in Christ with joy and thanksgiving. □

¹ John 10:30, 17:11

² John 14:10–11

³ John 5:17

⁴ Matthew 3:16–17

⁵ John 5:19

⁶ John 12:50

⁷ John 17:20–26

⁸ John 17:11

⁹ John 6:53

¹⁰ John 17:17–19

¹¹ John 17:20

¹² 2 Corinthians

3:18; Romans

8:17, 30; 1 John

3:2

¹³ Colossians

3:3–4

¹⁴ John 2:1–12

¹⁵ Matthew

15:32–38, Mark

8:34–44

¹⁶ Luke 10:1–3

¹⁷ Acts 8:26–40

¹⁸ Matthew

28:18–20

¹⁹ Galatians 2:20

²⁰ John 5:17

²¹ John 17:22

²² John 17:18, 14

²³ John 15:11

²⁴ John 14:27

“Suffer the little children”

Have you noticed the joy in children when they are having great fun? Their eyes light up and their laughter and excitement never cease throughout the day. My little daughter and nephew were having the time of their lives when we took them to the recreational park in Genting Highlands recently. The rollercoaster train ride was such fun for my daughter that she wanted to keep riding it over and over again. The erratic speed, sudden curves and sharp tilting turns of the ride wasn't my idea of excitement but for my daughter nothing could have been more exhilarating.

A few weeks later I saw a picture of another child also taking a ride. This one was very different. It was a picture that appeared in the August edition of the Asian Reader's Digest magazine that showed a little Bangladeshi boy perching dangerously at the back of the last carriage of a speeding train. His face showed no excitement or fun but rather sorrow and anguish as he had to travel this way to get to his destination where he had to collect scrap metal to eke out a living. I could not forget the sad look on his face. Here my daughter who is about the same age as the boy is under our care where my wife and I do our best to provide all her needs whereas in many parts of the world little boys and girls live miserable lives working in filthy conditions to help provide for their families. But things are much, much worse.

John Walsh, host of the television programme “America's Most Wanted” went undercover in Southeast Asia together with another

British police officer to investigate sex trafficking of Cambodian children. He was shocked to find western men from various European countries including the United States going there to buy sex services of 6 and 7-year-old boys and girls. He related how disgusting and heartbreaking it was to see this. The horror also includes little children in some countries being kidnapped and kept as slaves for such purposes.

How many of us are aware of the physical and mental abuse that children go through in many households? There are children being sexually abused by close family members; brutally beaten by deranged parents; maimed, poorly fed, and even used as drug pushers. The fact is that all of us are aware of these things. How can such atrocities continue to happen? It would seem



by
**Devaraj
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that a modern, materialistic, technologically advanced world has lost its humanity and most of us just accept this horrible situation as something that cannot be changed. Well, it must be changed for the sake of the little children.

Jesus always loved children. He said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the Kingdom of God.”¹ A child is precious in the sight of God. There is no excuse for the physical and mental abuse of any child. No nation, no matter how poor, needs the tourist money of pedophiles coming there for sex with children. Such individuals should be caught and dealt with no matter where they go to satisfy their depraved cravings. Jesus used a little child to demonstrate the mindset that God requires

in adults who wish to follow Him. He said, “Unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the Kingdom of God.”² God is surely displeased at how children are abused today. The question is, are you?

As we move into the year 2011, let's make protecting children as our highest priority. The battle against the abuse of children begins right where we live. Look out for signs of abuse in your neighbourhood. If you notice children showing signs of sexual abuse do not be afraid to report it to the authorities. We must do our part to make every pedophile know that he will not be tolerated. Help the poor. Join organisations that reach out to the underprivileged so that children from poor

families need not work in pathetic conditions to help their families make ends meet. There are so many charitable organisations that we can be a part of to make life more bearable for others. In fact you yourself can directly help children from poor families including orphans. Wouldn't this be a more meaningful New Year resolution? Every adult has the responsibility to be on the offensive against the abuse of children. We cannot be on the sidelines just watching. We can make a difference for the children. The evil committed against children is very real; we can't turn a blind eye to this. □



¹ Luke 18:16

² Matthew 18:3

Living as heirs

We are all familiar with the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32. The story tells of a renegade son who slopes off to a far away country with a fortune. Then, having squandered his wealth through wild living, facing famine and having to accept the lowliest job feeding pigs, he comes to his senses and returns home to his father—and brother. But his return is not met with anger and recriminations, but with forgiveness and celebration by his father.

It's a beautiful picture of our Heavenly Father's grace and forgiveness to those who repent. However, if we dig a little deeper, we find there is even more treasure to be unearthed in this story.

When the younger son asks for his inheritance, the father does not object but freely gives to both his sons. "The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them.¹ The Greek phrasing suggests that he distributes, not just his property, but all his resources. There is a liberal giving implied here.

The younger son knows his father well and doesn't hesitate to make his desires known. He asks and he receives substantially.

His faith is rewarded. Later on, he does not fear to go home—his father is probably a very caring and generous man—knowing that even his father's hired servants are looked after so richly with food, that there is a surplus. And the father outdoes his expectations: he receives sandals, a ring and the best robe, a loose fitting garment worn by kings, priests and persons of rank. The father doesn't see a poor wastrel, but rather what the young man could be, what he was called to be, and is glad to own him as his son.

He orders a great celebration with feasting, music and dancing²—this father is no party pooper. This is no grudging reconciliation or time for moral lectures and finger wagging, instead a time of great joy and

by
**Kate
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happiness for the 'lost' son now returned.

A jealous brother

But what of the older brother? As we read in Luke 15:12, he too had been given his share of the inheritance—and probably a double portion—in keeping with the custom of the time. But what has he done with his share, his destiny? Squandered it? No. Developed it and enjoyed it? It doesn't seem so.

He is labouring in the fields on his brother's return, and isn't amused to hear the sounds of music and dancing. He refuses to go in and join the celebration, and his angry resentment spills out to his father: 'I've been slaving for you for years (literally, been your bond



slave). And I haven't even received a young goat to make merry with my friends!³

But the young man already has his inheritance. It is his, a free gift. The goats are his! He already has the means to celebrate several times over. And undoubtedly the father would add blessing to blessing if he asked. How can he level such an accusation? This young man interprets his efforts all these years as 'slaving for his father, and obeying orders', yet all the time he is the beneficiary.

What a response! What a view of his life: instead of the delight of living in the good of an inheritance freely given, he sees his life as one of joyless slavery to his father. How can he have failed to understand his father

so completely? His liberal, bountiful father?

We read that the father went out to plead with him. We can hear the heart cry in the reply to his son's complaints: 'You are always with me, and all I have is yours.'⁴ What more could a son ask for? If this son had really known his father, wouldn't he have enjoyed his inheritance, lived in the good of it, worked joyfully to develop it, and celebrated continually with his father, all the blessings surrounding it?

Perception and reality

There are two tragedies here. First that the beloved son did not live in the good of his inheritance, and secondly that he did not value his father's presence. Why is this son living as a pauper and a slave? All the father has is his – all the goats, fattened calves, everything. He is rich, but living poor. He is full, but living empty. He is blessed, but living constrained. And the greatest impoverishment is that he doesn't know and enjoy his father's abiding presence.

This story is challenging in several ways. It questions the way we look at things. We need – continually – what someone has called a 'baptism of seeing'. We need to see our Heavenly Father correctly. The great Christian writer, A.W. Tozer, said, '*What comes into our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us... We tend by a secret law of the soul to move towards our mental image of God.*'⁵

The parable confronts me personally over my concept of God. Do I believe in a God who is disposed to bless his children abundantly, or one who will give me just enough to get by? Is he one who yearns after me to draw me to himself, or one who waits in judgement over my failings. Do I know so little of him that I cannot throw a party and invite him to be there! I am challenged to ask him to reveal himself afresh as I read his word, and to be prepared to give up my pitiful views, and enlarge my vision of him.

¹ Luke 15:12

² Luke 15:22–24

³ Luke 15:29

⁴ Luke 15:31

⁵ Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*, Harper Collins, 2009.

⁶ 2 Peter 1:3

I need to see the value he puts on our enjoying his presence. He longs to spend time with us. Do I take time to be quiet, and ask him to simply come and *be* with me. Do I spend my time talking *at* him rather than fellowshiping *with* him?

How much do I listen? I may claim my relationship with the Lord is the most important one in my life, but does it show in my priorities? Do my actions match my desires? Do I really value his abiding presence?

How do I see myself? As a son or daughter, an heir of the Father, or as a 'slave' living in joyless subservience? And do I see what has been given to me? Do I live like a pauper when I have an inheritance of enormous proportions, when he has given me everything I need for life and godliness?⁶

I have found it a good exercise to go through the New Testament and underline (or cut and paste from the Internet), all the verses which speak of what the Lord has given to us—our inheritance. Then, armed with understanding, I can ask myself 'Am I living as a son, or daughter, or as a slave?' With that fresh understanding, I can thank him for all his goodness—daily. And I can further consider what I'm going to do with all these blessings—enjoy myself indulgently, or use them to enrich the lives of the people around me?

Finally, I need to consider how I see my brothers and sisters—as co-heirs and inheritors of the blessings of God, or somehow as less (or more) worthy than myself. To think rightly about others, I have to think rightly about God *and* myself. It's difficult to have an attitude of grace to my neighbour, when I don't see how much has been poured out on me.

Let's ask the Father to open our eyes to see all his goodness to us. He is waiting with a new robe and the family ring. Let's run to him. □

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You belong, you are included, and you matter

Jesus did not come just to forgive our sins; He came to *heal* our sinful nature and make a new creation of us. He doesn't force us to accept His love, but because He loves us so dearly, His earnest desire is that we turn to Him and find true life.

Jesus was born, lived, died, rose from the dead and ascended to the Father's right hand as Lord and Savior and Mediator, having purified the sins of humanity. But He did not stop being human. He is still fully God and fully human. He is our advocate, our representative, standing in for us and substituting for us at the Father's right hand. As the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:4–6, "For there is only one God, and only one mediator between God and men, the *man* Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people..."

**by
Grace
Communion
International**

God has declared in Christ that *you* belong to Him; that you are *included*; that you *matter*. Our salvation comes through the perfect will of the Father, who is unswervingly committed to including us in the joy and fellowship He shares with the Son and Spirit.

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—and always will.

That's why the Christian life is all about love. □

Are Christians sinners or saints?

Most of us freely admit that we are sinners. Despite our best efforts to live a virtuous life, we fall short of saintly righteousness. In fact, we may excuse our flaws by commenting, “I’m no saint.”

Everyone is a sinner

If we say we are sinless we are deceiving ourselves.¹ That’s rather blunt, but true. Christians and non-Christians lose patience, get angry, speak unkind words, look down on others, and at times mess up in other obnoxious ways.

There may be some people, however, like the Pharisees of old, who view themselves as righteous because of their strict observance of numerous rules and rituals. Jesus, who *truly* was righteous, had some harsh words for the Pharisee’s version of “righteousness” when He directed a parable at them. He spoke of two men who prayed in the Temple. The first man, a Pharisee, esteemed himself better than other men because of his good deeds and meticulous religious observances. In contrast, the second man, a tax collector, simply said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Jesus concluded, “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”²

We see from Jesus’ parable that it takes more than rituals, rule-keeping and good deeds to raise us to the kind of righteousness that God desires. We might wonder why Jesus favoured the tax collector—they were viewed as dishonest traitors because they collected taxes for the Roman Empire. 1 Samuel 16:7 tells us, “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.” God looks for humility, honesty, and willing obedience in our inward parts. Isaiah explained it this way when he quoted God as saying, “This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word.”³

King David, after committing some serious sins, and realising his helplessness to conquer sin, cried out, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”⁴ He knew he couldn’t eliminate sin by his own efforts. Neither can we. Only the Creator God can create in us hearts that love truth and righteousness. Like David, we need to acknowledge our impure thoughts and actions and ask



by
Paul Hailey

God to transform us on the inside. From our personal perspective we know that we sin.

We might conclude that we are sinners, not “saints”. But, wait! There is more to consider.

What is a saint?

The common idea of a “saint” is that of a person who is nearly perfect, or who was used as God’s instrument in performing miracles, or perhaps someone who was martyred. But the Bible uses the word “saint” in a different way.

Scripture refers to *all* Christians as “saints”. In the Apostle Paul’s letters to the congregations under his care, he referred to church members as “saints”, even though he frequently corrected them for serious problems. For example, in his first letter to the Christians of Corinth he greeted them as “saints”, but then chastised them, pointing out that they were divided, disorderly, unloving, and undisciplined. Yet they were “*saints*”.

It gives me comfort and assurance that God makes “saints” out of flawed people!

It is not rituals, ceremonies, or outstanding achievements that make Christians “saints”. The Greek word translated “saint” means “set apart”. People become saints by responding to the gospel, by acknowledging their need for forgiveness, and by trusting in Jesus as personal Saviour. They are then set apart, by their own choice, and become Christians.

So from God’s perspective, Christians are “saints” because they have responded to God’s invitation to follow and trust Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

So Christians can correctly say that they are *both* saints and sinners. But is there a preferred way that Christians should view themselves?

How should Christians view themselves—sinners or saints?

Christians need to admit their struggle with sin as the tax collector did. But they should not be burdened by lingering remorse or guilt that initiates negative feelings about themselves. The Apostle Paul wrote these words to the saints in Rome, “In the same way—count yourselves dead to sin but *alive* to God in Christ Jesus.”⁵ Christians are “dead to sin”, meaning that *all* of their sins—past, present and future have been cast aside—



continued on page 20

Another look at repentance

Repentance is a cornerstone of Christian life, yet when it is misunderstood—as it often is—it can cause Christians to live with needless fear and doubt about their relationship with God.

The most common way to misunderstand repentance is to think that to repent is to stop sinning. But since we all *do* still sin despite how much we repent, we have to assume that our repentance is not “deep” enough or “true” enough and we strive harder. No matter how hard we try, though, sin remains in our lives, and our lack of success gives us a growing sense of frustration and anxiety about how we stand with God. Eventually, some burn out and give up trying.

We don't have to go down that path. The truth is, repentance toward God is simply not about a new and improved you and me. It's about a new *perspective*, a new way of *looking* at things that were already true *long* before we came to see them. It's a change in how we *think* about God and about ourselves.

Repentance is not a behaviour issue. It's a faith, or trust, issue. Jesus has already done everything that needed to be done to restore humanity to a right relationship with God. There's nothing we can add to that or take away from it. Repentance isn't about promising to never sin again. It isn't about striving to be a better person. Repentance is about believing God's



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**

word of truth about who He is and who we are.

In 1 Corinthians 1:30-31, the apostle Paul wrote, “It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

Jesus *is* our life and our righteousness. We are a new creation *in Him*, holy and righteous *not of ourselves*, but in Him.

In Matthew 11:28-30, Jesus said to his disciples, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Repentance is the start of a new relationship, a new friendship, not the start of a sinless life. Our righteousness is real only because it is Jesus' righteousness *given* to us, not because we can achieve it ourselves. And that means it will endure forever. So we have nothing to fear. We can take all our weariness and all our burdens to Jesus and find rest for our souls. □

Grace walk: What you've always wanted in the Christian life

Have you striven to do all the right things, such as attending church faithfully, praying fervently, serving cheerfully and reading the Bible daily in an effort to draw closer to God? Do you feel frustrated because you aren't good enough and guilty because you can't do enough? You are not alone. *Grace Walk*¹ gives encouragement to those who find that no matter how hard they try, they still feel like spiritual failures.

Although we know we are saved by grace, most of us are still trying to earn salvation, or at least favour with God. Yet God already loves us and Jesus died for us while we were sinners. Doing things will not draw us closer to Him, because He is already in us. You can't get any closer than that. People believe the Christian life to be primarily a life of service, when it should primarily be a life of intimacy with God.

A byproduct of this intimacy is service, but our service does not draw us closer to God; our closeness

by
**Barbara
Dahlgren**

with God naturally manifests itself through service.

This intimacy will spill over into every aspect of our lives. Instead of approaching the Bible as a legalistic list of dos and don'ts, we will focus on knowing God. Instead of just saying scheduled prayers, we will enter into a continual prayer relationship with God. Instead of striving for victory, we realise that Christ in us is the victory!

I thoroughly enjoyed *Grace Walk* and McVey's approach. This easy-to-read book helped me refocus on the fact that Christ isn't simply in my life, He is my life. In Him we live and move and have our being. *Grace Walk* suggests that the Christian life is a lot easier if we let Christ do it. □

¹ McVey, Steve.
Grace Walk,
Harvest House
Publishers,
2005.

Love is...

One of my favourite musicals is *Fiddler on the Roof*. The music is wonderful and the story is one of hope and faith in the midst of tragedy and hardship. One particularly interesting scene is of a funeral, complete with paid mourners. I've never understood why a family would pay people to attend a funeral for the specific purpose of wailing and crying. I guess it added to the atmosphere and helped everyone feel sadder.

Mourning death of loved ones is normal and good, but in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 we read we are not to mourn as those who have no hope. I've always understood this to mean we can be assured of the resurrection for those who have accepted Christ and died in the faith. But I've come to understand it also gives hope for those who didn't come to belief before death. All human beings are included in Christ. His life, death and resurrection are big enough to cover and include everyone who ever lived, and even those who died before drawing breath.

When I lost two babies to miscarriages, I mourned the loss of children I wouldn't know. I found a comforting book called *I'll Hold You in Heaven* by Jack Hayford, with a profound message of hope for all who have lost children to miscarriage, abortion or stillbirth. He said we have reason to hope and believe we will see those babies again. They are not lost simply because they didn't draw breath. As David said, God knew him in the womb. And the foetus who became John the Baptist leapt for joy when his mother Elizabeth met Mary, who was carrying Jesus. All life is known and precious to God and His life and love are

by
Tammy Tkach

extended to us before birth and to those whose lives are cut short even before birth.

When contemplating the question of people who didn't know Jesus before death and those who didn't even draw breath, we would do well to remember a few things—God is all powerful. Even though we believe this, I think we sometimes still put limits on Him. Is death too strong for Him? Is anyone out of His reach? Is anyone so incorrigible they can't be softened by the gentle yet passionate love of God? Are we qualified to make a judgment about the state of anyone's salvation?



Theologian Karl Barth, who was not a Universalist, said he preferred to leave the question open in hope and put the outcome in God's hands, to be "reverently agnostic". In his book, *God Here and Now*, Barth said: "A grace which automatically would ultimately have to embrace each and every one would certainly not be free grace. It surely would not be God's grace. But would it be God's free grace if we could absolutely deny that it could do that? Has Christ been sacrificed only for

our sins? Has He not... been sacrificed for the whole world?... [Thus] the freedom of grace is preserved on both these sides."

We don't have all the answers. Many things remain beyond our grasp. The questions we have about those who lived before Christ, died without Him and didn't live to know Him are difficult and unanswerable. But we can reverently hope and trust in our God who is love and in whose love is power, wisdom, freedom and grace for everyone. □

¹ 1 Corinthians 13:4–8

² 1 John 4:8

continued from page 18

never to be held against them.

Instead, Christians are "alive to God in Christ Jesus"—a positive expression of confidence that their immortality is certain. All Christians should feel overwhelming joy and confidence in the fact that God accurately sees and determines their future resurrection to everlasting life. From His supreme vantage point, He calls them "saints", not yet perfect, but to be perfected when Jesus returns.⁶

¹ 1 John 1:8

² Luke 18:9–14

³ Isaiah 66:2

⁴ Psalm 51:10

⁵ Romans 6:11

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:50–54

We who are Christians may not feel like "saints" in the usual sense of the word. We acknowledge our flaws. But God's perspective is different. He has a positive view of us because He knows our future—to be made immortal with hearts that will be cleansed from all desire to sin.

Let's be ever joyful in the fact that we are *alive to God in Christ Jesus!* □

Don't ask the Lord to guide your footsteps if you are not willing to move your feet.

Anonymous

Beautiful young people are accidents of nature, but beautiful old people are works of art.

Eleanor Roosevelt

Some people, no matter how old they get, never lose their beauty—they merely move it from their faces into their hearts.

Martin Buxbaum

I wish, brothers and sisters, that we could all imitate "the pearl oyster." A hurtful particle intrudes itself into its shell, and this vexes and grieves it. It cannot reject the evil, but what does it do but "cover" it with a precious substance extracted out of its own life, by which it turns the intruder into a pearl! Oh, that we could do so with the provocations we receive from our fellow Christians, so that pearls of patience, gentleness, and forgiveness might be bred within us by that which otherwise would have harmed us.

Charles Spurgeon

Make time to pray. The great freight and passenger trains are never too busy to stop for fuel. No matter how congested the yards may be, no matter how crowded the schedules are, no matter how many things demand the attention of the trainmen, those trains always stop for fuel.

M.E. Andross

Repentance is not a behaviour issue. It's a faith, or trust, issue. Jesus has already done everything that needed to be done to restore humanity to a right relationship with God. There's nothing we can add to that or take away from it. Repentance isn't about promising never to sin again. Nor is it about striving to be a better person. Repentance is about believing God's word of truth about who he is and who we are.

Brian D. McLaren

I am only one, but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; and because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do.

The Christian Life is about relationships, not performance.

Neil Franks

Putting our trust in God and depending on His intrinsic goodness frees us from the need to find explanations for everything.

Frank Retief

If we do not die to ourselves, we cannot live to God, and he that does not live to God, is dead.

George MacDonald

For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

1 Corinthians 15:22-23

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all

your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6

One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty.

Proverbs 11:24

There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

Proverbs 14:12

Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.

Romans 4:7-8

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

1 John 4:7-8

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 Peter 2:9-10

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 15:1

The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.

Proverbs 15:3

Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Proverbs 3:9-10

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 1:7

Raised voices lower esteem. Hot tempers cool friendships. Loose tongues stretch truth. Swelled heads shrink influence. Sharp words dull respect.

William Arthur Ward

God is the God of promise. He keeps His word, even when that seems impossible; even when the circumstances seem to point to the opposite.

Colin Urquhart

Because our understanding is earthbound... human to the core... limited... finite... we operate in a dimension totally unlike our Lord... who knows no such limitations.

We see now. He sees forever.

Charles R. Swindoll

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I [Jesus] will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Matthew 11:28-30

I [St. John] saw "a new heaven and a new earth", for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God... I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. He [Jesus] who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!... Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

Revelation 21:1-5

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,
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40800 Shah Alam,
Selangor, Malaysia.**

Everyone

Jesus did most of His ministry in the Jewish areas of Galilee and Judea. But on at least one occasion, He traveled north of Galilee. He used the retreat to debrief His disciples, to discuss His mission, and to teach a fundamental lesson about what it means to be a disciple.

Peter identifies Jesus as the Messiah¹

Jesus and His disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. This was about 25 miles north of the Sea of Galilee. On the way He asked them, “Who do people say I am?” He already knew what the people

by
**Dr. Michael
Morrison**

feed 5,000 people. Peter concluded, You are the man God will use to rescue us.

Peter’s response was correct. But Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about Him. On several occasions, Jesus wanted His identity kept a secret.² Large crowds were already a hindrance to his ministry. Further, Jesus did not want the rulers to see Him as a political rival.

Jesus wanted His disciples to be quiet about His identity because what *they* meant by the word “Messiah” was quite different from what Jesus actually was. Peter had the right word, but a seriously flawed concept of what the Messiah would do. This is the next



thought, but the question led to an important teaching point.

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” Some people thought that Jesus preached in the style of John; others that He was like Elijah, or some other prophet.

“But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter said what the others probably thought but were afraid to say: “You are the Messiah.” They had seen Him cast out demons, heal the sick, walk on water, and

thing that Jesus teaches them.

Jesus predicts his death³

For the first time, Jesus predicted His own death: He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and after three days rise again.

“The Son of Man” is a reference to Daniel’s vision of “one like a son of man” who was given a kingdom. When the angel interpreted the vision, he said the

must die!

kingdom would be given to the persecuted *saints*.⁴ The “son of man” represented all the saints. Jesus saw Himself as this person who represented the persecuted people of God. He would accept the kingdom on their behalf—and be persecuted on their behalf.

Jesus also saw Himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of a servant who would suffer on behalf of His people⁵; Isaiah and Daniel were describing the same person.

This was not what most Jews thought—most people assumed that the Messiah would be a victorious king, not a suffering servant. So Jesus taught here that the “son of man” would be rejected by the Jewish authorities, killed on behalf of His people, and then rise again.

In some of His teachings, Jesus spoke in parables that hid part of the meaning⁶; this time, however, He spoke plainly about this. But this new revelation was so *contrary* to expectations, that Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him.

One minute, Peter declares Jesus to be the leader God sent to His people. The next minute, Peter is contradicting his God-appointed leader! This is an emotional reaction. What Jesus said deeply disturbed Peter’s idea of what the Messiah would do—and what He would do for Peter himself.

The disciples expected to receive certain benefits for following Jesus. They had left family, jobs and homes, and it was natural that they wanted a reward.⁷ Some wanted to be the greatest in the kingdom.⁸ They were thinking that the kingdom of Jesus would be similar to the kingdoms of this world, where the king’s closest friends got the most benefits.

Peter was looking forward to being the chief of staff, the secretary of state, or someone important in the new government. But Jesus had just taken his high hopes and smashed them.

Peter had the presence of mind to take Jesus aside and “correct” His teacher privately. Repent of this defeatist attitude! We won’t let it happen—we’ll take up swords and protect you!

We do not know if the other disciples could hear what Peter and Jesus said. But Jesus’ reply was said with them in mind: But when Jesus turned and looked at His disciples, He rebuked Peter. “Get behind me, Satan!” He said. Jesus calls Peter Satan, the Hebrew word for “adversary.” Peter is opposing God’s plan.

You have called me your leader, and I am, Jesus might have said. So get behind me and *follow*—don’t try to get in front and lead. You don’t even know where you are going. “You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.”

Peter was thinking about the things that ordinary human beings think about. He wanted what his friends and neighbors did: freedom from foreign oppression, safety, security, money, and a reward for the risk and the work.

But God has something a lot more important in mind than that. He can see an enemy that is stronger than Rome, an enemy that must be conquered by suffering and death, not by replacing Roman overlords with Jewish ones.

Take up the cross⁹

The lesson Jesus wanted to teach Peter was needed by everyone. So Jesus called the crowd to Him along with His disciples and said: Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

If you want to learn from me, He said, you must put aside your desires for fame and fortune, and be willing to die. You must be willing to follow me into death, if that’s where it ends up. I am not looking for people who simply want to benefit themselves. The world already has enough of those people.

And why should people be willing to give up their lives? For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. If your priority is on saving your life, you will be a loser, because you *will* die.

But if you are willing to lose your life for Jesus, and die for His kingdom, then you will save your life. Jesus is talking about life *after* you die, and that is the perspective we all need.

If we focus on life in this age, we will lose it. But if we focus on Jesus and His message, we will have a better life in the age to come. The losses are temporary, but the rewards are eternal.

What good is it, Jesus asks, for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul? No matter whether you are thinking about military conquest or financial gain, what good would it do you, even if you have the maximum success possible? You are still going to die. There is an enemy here, an oppression that is far worse than Rome.

What can you give in exchange for your soul? Even if you had the whole world, you could not buy your life back. So why struggle for such a temporary victory?

What we need is a Messiah who conquers death itself—and that can be done only by someone who enters death and emerges victorious on the other side. We need a Messiah who dies and returns to life.

Jesus summarizes by pointing to the day of reward: If any of you are ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.

If we cannot accept the sort of Messiah that Jesus actually is, if we cannot accept what He teaches, then Jesus will be disappointed about the priority we chose. He is offering us an endless age of divine glory; tragically, some are seeking first a short-lived life in a very troubled world. He does not reject us permanently, just as He did not reject Peter, but He will lament that we chose such a small reward. □

¹ Mark 8:27–30

² Mark 1:25,34

³ Mark 8:31–33

⁴ Daniel 7:13–27

⁵ Isaiah 53

⁶ Mark 4:11

⁷ Matthew 19:27

⁸ Mark 10:37

⁹ Mark 8:34–37

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