

# THE Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Feb-Mar 2012

## Jesus Christ's last sermon

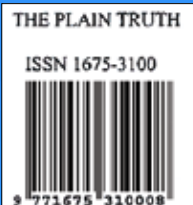
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PP 12578/03/2012 (029371)

# Three views of God

There are three popular views of God today. Some see God as legalistic, some as relational, some as legalistic *and* relational.

Which view is correct? Does it really matter which view we hold? Does it make any difference in our lives? This article will address these questions.

## Legalistic view

In the *forensic or legalistic view*, people see God as a judge, one who gives laws (referring to the Old Covenant or Mosaic laws, e.g. the 10 commandments) and judges them based on how well they observe them.

This view pictures God as harsh and dreadful. It focuses on performance—rewards for obedience and punishment for disobedience. It casts doubts: “Have I done enough? Have I done well? Is God pleased with me? How can I know?” This *rule-based relationship* produces fear because we know we have sinned. So it doesn’t produce intimacy with God.

For example, God gave Ancient Israel laws but they broke them again and again. So they were afraid to approach Him because of fear of punishment or rejection. They preferred an intermediary (like Moses) to act on their behalf. So they didn’t experience an intimate relationship with Him.

Did God create us to simply keep rules? Is life all about keeping rules? Do we really want a *rule-based relationship* with God for all eternity?

## Relational view

In the *relational view*, we see God as our loving Father, Friend and Companion who invites us to share our life with Him. It presents God as one who loves us unconditionally and who will never abandon us no matter how far we have strayed from Him.

This view is *grace-based—based on God’s unconditional love*. It focuses on honourable, enjoyable, cherished relationships. It focuses on forgiveness, reconciliation, acceptance and friendship. It is *other-centred* love. It produces peace, joy, assurance, security and intimacy.

## Legalistic-relational view

In the *legalistic-relational view*, people see God as both Judge and Saviour. They believe Jesus will judge them based on how well they have kept His laws. They believe law-keeping defines their relationship with Him. So they dare not focus too much on grace because they fear it will lead them astray and disobey God. They insist that salvation requires both law and grace.

This view poses a serious problem. If they view Jesus as Judge, it strikes fear because they know they have

by  
Dr. P.  
Sellappan

sinned. They worry about their standing with Him. So they don’t experience His love, peace and assurance. On the other hand, if they see Him as gracious, they know He has forgiven them, which gives them peace of mind. This view produces mood swings—conflicting feelings—depending on how they see God at any given instance. It simultaneously produces peace and fear, acceptance and rejection. It produces an unhealthy relationship.

## Misinterpretation

Many misinterpret the words *judgment* and *grace*. They equate judgment to condemning/punishing and grace to giving license to sin. *Judgment* (in Greek, *krisis*) means giving people the opportunity to know the truth [Jesus] and letting them make a decision to accept or reject. It is giving them the opportunity to repent and be restored.

*Grace means being led by the Holy Spirit*. It means to be free from or not under the Old Covenant laws. *It doesn’t mean lawlessness. It means to be under the New Covenant law of love or the law of Christ/God/Spirit.*<sup>1</sup>

The Spirit never leads one to sin. On the contrary, it teaches us to shun all ungodliness.<sup>2</sup> It teaches us to love God and fellowman.<sup>3</sup> It leads us to right living.

Keeping the Old Covenant law by our human effort is not superior to keeping the New Covenant law by the Holy Spirit. The law cannot save us. Jesus working through the Holy Spirit saves us. Grace—trusting in God’s unconditional love—saves us. It produces

intimacy with God which the law can never do.

## Correct view

So which of the three views is correct? I believe the *relational or grace-based view* is the correct one as it is Spirit-led and therefore has life-transforming power. It leads us to participate in the *shared life* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *It leads us to intimacy because it is God working inside of us through the Holy Spirit, not of our own making.*

So where does *law-keeping or grace-plus-law* come in? God’s grace covers all sins—past, present and future sins. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ and even that is a gift from God.

The Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—is a relational being. They don’t have laws to regulate their lives. They joyfully give themselves to each other in *self-giving love* and this is what produces intimacy. This is what God is offering you. Would you receive it? □

“The law cannot save us.  
Jesus working through  
the Holy Spirit saves us.  
Grace—trusting in God’s  
unconditional love—saves us.”

<sup>1</sup> Romans 8:2–8, 13:10; Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21  
<sup>2</sup> Titus 2:11–12  
<sup>3</sup> Matthew 22:37–40

# THE Plain Truth

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Issue No. 5	Volume No. 10
February–March 2012	PP 12578/03/2012 (029371)
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The Plain Truth is published five times a year as funds allow, and is sponsored by the Worldwide Church of God Malaysia, which is a member of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia. It follows a non-denominational editorial policy and provides a message of practical help, hope and encouragement from a Christian perspective.  
 - For Non-Muslims Only -

DONATIONS: Although we do not put any subscription price for THE PLAIN TRUTH, we gratefully welcome donations from readers who support our desire to bring spiritual knowledge and understanding to our increasingly secular society. Cheques should be made payable to 'The Plain Truth' and mailed to the postal address listed above.

Printed in Malaysia by:  
 Hin Press & Trading Sdn Bhd (71078-D)  
 No. PT 45855, Batu 2, Jalan Kapar,  
 41400 Klang, Selangor, Malaysia

ISSN 1675-3100. Copyright Worldwide Church of God, 2012.

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# What our readers say:

For many years, THE PLAIN TRUTH has been a great source of my spiritual food. Thank you all for making the fine, subscription-free magazine available to so many. Your faithfulness in carrying out the work all these years has been much appreciated and gratefully received.

**Ang Tun Hock**  
**Penang**

As a Christian, the magazine gives me an in-depth understanding of Christianity. The articles published are thought-provoking, whereby all members of the family can read and reflect on them. At times we do share our views and discuss some articles, especially those concerning family matters.

**Mary Ann Chan**  
**Singapore**

It contains a lot of information on spiritual life which is very much lacking in this world. All the articles are well written and inspiring. They help me to understand the works of God. It's been a lifelong quest to learn and understand the meaning of life and THE PLAIN TRUTH certainly helps me along the way.

**Gnoh Swee Lin**  
**Sungei Petani**

Thank you for sending THE PLAIN TRUTH regularly to me. I always look forward to receiving it. It has a spiritually uplifting and edifying effect. You and your staff are doing a wonderful job. Surely God will bless all of you for spreading His Word.

**Dr. Mah Peh Yong**  
**Kuala Lumpur**

I've appreciated THE PLAIN TRUTH for many years, first reading my father's copies as a little girl right up to now. I'm grateful for the magazine and hence here's a contribution. I can't give much as I'm a pensioner and am supporting a bi-polar relative.

**Maltida Jacobs**  
**Seremban**

It helps to strengthen my faith and bolster my failing human spirit. It serves as very helpful inspiration drawing from your pool of dedicated writers.

**Vincent Hoe**  
**Singapore**

THE PLAIN TRUTH helps me greatly, especially in difficult times when I turn to God more. Your magazine is an inspiration to me and deepens my thoughts and insights into God's Word. Thank you for doing God's Work.

**Irene Tan**  
**Johor Bahru**

Through the articles written by devoted writers, I gain help in understanding what God is conveying to me in His Word, which can be quite frustrating if I try to interpret it by myself. The articles also help me to know what others are thinking and shed light on the experiences which they have gone through in their God-centered life. May it be God's will that THE PLAIN TRUTH continues to bring understanding to the world.

**Albert Moo**  
**Singapore**

THE PLAIN TRUTH is well written, thoughtful and sensitive. It is valuable in helping me to understand problems from a Biblical perspective. It constantly reminds me of my need for Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Now with THE PLAIN TRUTH I do not need to turn to all kinds of books and magazines which only give temporary pleasure. I need more solid meat and your magazine provides this. I thank God for THE PLAIN TRUTH magazine.

**Foong Mai Yam**  
**Ipoh**

The articles are thought-provoking and relevant in today's context. It is good reading for a growing Christian like me. Thank you very much and God bless you all.

**Maria Goh**  
**Singapore**

It increases my faith in God who is the Almighty. The articles guide and lead me to a spiritual life and they are not stale.

**Harjit Singh**  
**Ipoh**

The Word of God is presented in a refreshing manner, linking seemingly unrelated and insignificant events to His Almighty Power and Plan.

**Tan Pin Ho**  
**Singapore**

It is very inspirational reading. Thanks a million!

**Syra George Mokunjl**  
**Sandakan**

As a "baby" Christian, I am learning what God's purpose is for me, what He wants me to do, and how He wants me to handle my life's situations. I have a couple of soft copies, the latest being last year's August edition. I am unable to find your website. Your magazine has helped me so much. Can I get hold of your bimonthly magazine in hard copy?

**Andy Ong**  
**Penang**

*Ed.: Our website ([www.gci-malaysia.org](http://www.gci-malaysia.org)) appears on page 3. To subscribe, please SMS your address or call 017-2559244 and we will put your name on our mailing list.*

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**The Plain Truth**  
**A/C No: 1203-0386318-05-6**  
**CIMB BANK BHD**  
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**12-14 Jalan Dato Hamzah**  
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**Selangor, MALAYSIA.**

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# Jesus Christ's last sermon

Jesus Christ spent His final hours of human life nailed to a cross. Despised and rejected by the world He came to save, history's only perfect person took upon Himself the consequences of our sins. The Bible records that on that spring day, from a hill outside Jerusalem, Jesus spoke several times. No one Gospel writer records all His sayings. Matthew and Mark describe one. Luke and John each give us three. Together, these sayings constitute a powerful message from our Saviour's heart during the hours of His greatest personal agony. They reveal Jesus' innermost feelings as He poured out His life for us.

by  
**Grace  
Communion  
International**

But a miraculous change occurred in the other criminal. He came to believe. This man was just as guilty as the first. He admitted he deserved to die. He, too, had mocked Jesus earlier, but now he rebuked the other criminal.

We are not told of any other conversation between this second criminal and Jesus. Perhaps only Jesus' example and prayer, which he overheard, moved him so deeply. He said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus replied by offering him hope for the future: "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."<sup>5</sup>

## 1) "Father, forgive them"

Only Luke tells us that Jesus, shortly after He was crucified, prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."<sup>1</sup>

Nearby were Roman soldiers gambling for His clothes, common people whipped to frenzy by the religious leaders, and gawkers who came for the hideous spectacle. The Jewish elders mockingly said they would believe in Him if He saved Himself.<sup>2</sup> On His left and right were two criminals condemned to die with Him.

Not everyone at the foot of the cross was hostile to Jesus. Women who had followed Him during His ministry and some of His disciples now came forward. His mother, Mary, was mourning the Son whom God had miraculously given her.

Innocent of any crime against God or humanity, Jesus had been betrayed, arrested, scourged and condemned. Now, from the cross, Jesus' thoughts reached above His pain and rejection. Instead of being consumed with His own pain and misery, Jesus asked forgiveness for those responsible for the evil done to Him—by extension, all who ignorantly go the way of sin and death.

## 2) "You will be with me in paradise"

Jesus next spoke to encourage one of the criminals crucified with Him. Both criminals, likely thieves or murderers, early on joined bystanders in reviling Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Luke tells us, "One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at Him: 'Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us!'"<sup>4</sup> This man wanted only escape from his pain. The gulf between them remained, because this faithless criminal had no desire to know his Saviour and repent of his sins.



As did the first criminal, most people reject Jesus Christ. Their petitions to God thus go unanswered. However, all who surrender to Jesus receive not only strength to face the present, but also lasting hope for the future. There is a future beyond the grave. Eternal life in God's kingdom awaits those who will embrace Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

## 3) "Woman, behold your son!"

Jesus honoured and showed concern for His mother. When it seemed impossible for Him to help anyone, He provided for Mary's care through His trusted friend John.

"When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' From that time on, this disciple took her into his home."<sup>6</sup>

## 4) "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"

For the first time, Jesus' thoughts were on Himself. He cried out, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—

which means, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?'"<sup>7</sup>

Many have puzzled over Jesus' seeming doubt. Was Jesus afraid? Had His Father deserted Him in His greatest need? Jesus was quoting the first portion of Psalm 22:1, a prophecy of the Messiah's suffering and exaltation.

We sometimes forget that Jesus was fully human. Yes, He was God in the flesh, but He was also subject to all the feelings of mind and body that any of us feel. Jesus spoke these words after three hours of darkness had covered the land.<sup>8</sup> Jesus hung on the cross alone, where He took our place to feel the pain and anguish

that sin causes.

There, in the darkness and pain, bearing the burden of our sins, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "Surely He took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered Him stricken by God, smitten by Him, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."<sup>9</sup>

Soon Christ would savour the sweetness of eternal victory over sin and death. His final three statements came in rapid succession.

#### 5) "I am thirsty"

Death drew near. The time of final sacrifice was close. Jesus had endured—and overcome—the heat, pain, rejection and loneliness. He could have suffered and died in silence. Instead, unexpectedly, He asked for help. "Knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, 'I am thirsty.'<sup>10</sup>

Jesus asked for a drink and received vinegar, fulfilling David's 1,000-year-old prophecy.<sup>11</sup> "Immediately one of them ran and got a sponge. He filled it with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink."<sup>12</sup> The man who had hurried to answer Jesus' request said: "Now leave Him alone. Let's see if Elijah comes to take Him down."<sup>13</sup>

#### 6) "It is finished"

Jesus had finished His work on earth. His sixth message was one of triumph: "When He had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."<sup>14</sup>

Jesus' humility rings in His words. His was not a vain, I-showed-you attitude. He did not even say, "I did it." He claimed no credit. He asked no pity. To the end, Jesus' mind was on the work He came to do. He announced, for all to hear, "It is finished."

#### 7) Jesus' final words

Matthew tells us, "And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit."<sup>15</sup> Only Luke preserves Jesus' words: "Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.' When He had said this, He breathed His last."<sup>16</sup>

God is love, and Jesus' ministry showed what love is. He gave Himself for us. He preached His last sermon most effectively, by both word and example. In His last seven statements, He affirmed God's greatness and glory.

#### God's work goes on

Jesus' example and words on the cross bore fruit even before His death, when the repentant robber acknowledged Him as Lord and appealed for His mercy.

On that Passover so long ago, Jesus finished His own mission as a human on earth. But His work goes on now in His church. Christ's followers today preach His gospel of salvation. They show His love for fellow human being. And they look for His return as King of kings and Lord of lords.

This is the wonderful message of good news that Jesus Christ preached the day He died for all. □

## Seven sayings of Jesus on the cross

*Jesus shared in our humanity. He set an example for us, suffered for us and was victorious over sin and death in His work on the cross. His victory, both in His death and His resurrection, enables us to be reconciled with God and restored to fellowship with Him.*

*While hanging on the cross, Jesus spoke of:*

*1. Forgiveness  
(Luke 23:32–34)*

*2. Hope  
(Luke 23:39–43)*

*3. Care  
(John 19:25–27)*

*4. Loneliness  
(Mark 15:33–34; Matthew 27:45–46)*

*5. Suffering  
(John 19:28–29)*

*6. Triumph  
(John 19:30)*

*7. Reunion  
(Luke 23:44–46)*

<sup>1</sup> Luke 23:34

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 27:42–43

<sup>3</sup> Mark 15:32

<sup>4</sup> Luke 23:39

<sup>5</sup> Luke 23:43

<sup>6</sup> John 19:26–27

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 27:46;

Mark 15:34

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 27:45

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 53:4–6

<sup>10</sup> John 19:28

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 69:21

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 27:48

<sup>13</sup> Mark 15:36

<sup>14</sup> John 19:30

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 27:50;

Mark 15:37

<sup>16</sup> Luke 23:46

# I am an addict

**I**t is very difficult to admit that one is an addict. Throughout my life I have been lying to myself and those around me.

Fortunately, one day it hit me on my forehead. I was an addict. I needed help. If you know somebody who is addicted, or are addicted yourself, read on... From one addict to another, you may find help.

I have come across many addicts. These are people who were addicted to different things like alcohol, cocaine, *dagga* (marijuana), heroin, *tik* (common in Republic of South Africa) and many others.

In all the cases I have witnessed, the results of the addiction are the same. Firstly, the person's body starts to deteriorate. I have watched people die a painful death from liver cirrhosis due to alcohol abuse. I have seen people's bodies shred to pieces in vehicle accidents caused by drugs or alcohol. You might have seen pictures of celebrities who turned into shadows or skeletons of their former selves.

Secondly, I have seen how the addict's relationships are utterly destroyed. He or she is alienated from family and friends, from children, parents, brothers and sisters, from bosses at work, and from neighbours. The only friends that remain for the addict, if you can call them that, are the drug dealers or the suppliers of the alcohol. Some of the addicts end up completely enslaved to their drug dealers through prostitution, committing crimes and other illegal dealings for the benefit of the drug dealer. For example, Thandeka (not her real name) prostituted herself for food and drugs from her pimp until somebody saved her out of that life.

Thirdly, I have noted that the addict's thinking is also affected. Some start hallucinating, seeing and hearing things that do not exist. They start thinking anybody

by  
**Takalani  
Musekwa**

who denies them the drugs does not love them. A life of drugs becomes the only thing there is for them. They actually start believing they cannot get out. In fact, they start believing drugs are good, and should be legalised for everyone to enjoy.

## **Each day a struggle**

In all cases where the addict lived to tell the story, I have found somebody who took pity on them and offered help. In most cases this person will take the addict out of the drug den and straight into the rehabilitation centre. They will pay for everything that the rehabilitation centre requires. Those who run rehabilitation centres say that the chances of success are good if the addict accepts that they are addicted and need help. In fact, some try up to five rehab centres before they succeed.

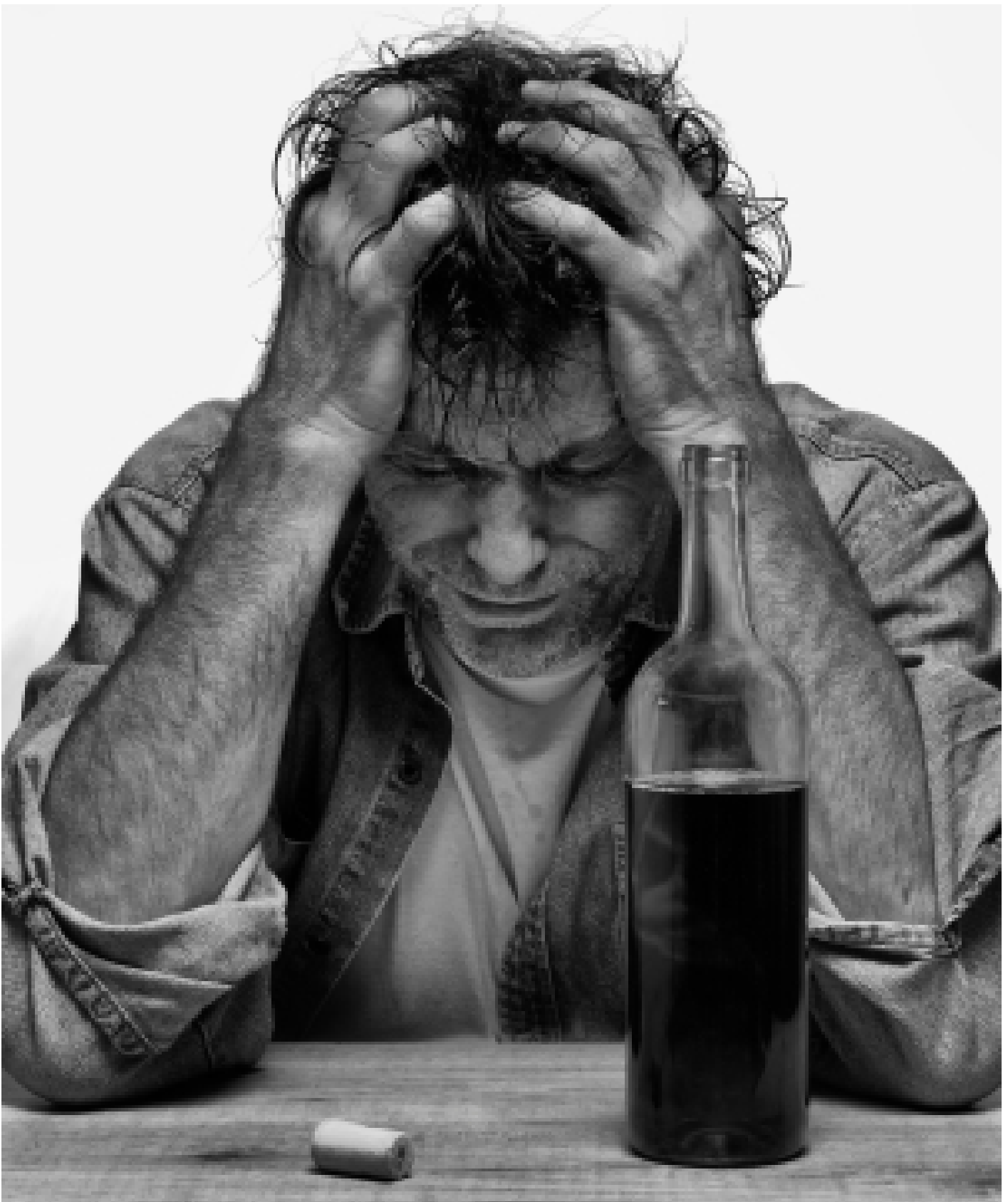
I have met and talked to people who run rehabilitation centres. Quite a number of them are ex-addicts. They are the first to admit that even after 10 years free of drugs, each day remains a struggle to stay clean. The biggest problem, they say, is that drugs follow them into rehab centres. One of them told me a rehab centre is one place where you can be sure to find drugs!

## **My kind of addiction**

My addiction started with my ancestors. Somebody told them to eat of a certain plant because it would make them wise. No, the plant was not cannabis from which *dagga* (marijuana) is made,

nor was it the coca plant from which cocaine is made. But it had similar consequences for them. As it is with most addicts, their relationship with their father fell apart. In fact, relationships broke down so much that one of their sons killed his brother. After they ate of that plant, their bodies became addicted. I have inherited





the addiction from them.

Let me tell you how I came to know of my addiction. If it was not for my brother Paul, who was also an addict, I would probably still be oblivious to the fact. After Paul realised he was an addict, he started writing letters to us, his brothers and sisters, to warn us about the addiction. Those addicted to alcohol are called alcoholics, others are simply called users, or junkies, or crackpots, or dopers. Those with my kind of addiction are called sinners.

In one of his letters, my brother Paul said, "When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought

death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned."<sup>1</sup> Paul realised he was a sinner. Because of his addiction, his sin, he was busy going around killing his brothers and putting others in jail. In his warped, addicted (sinful) mind he thought he was doing a good thing. As all addicts, Paul needed somebody to show him he needed help. So one day while he was on his way to Damascus on one of his murderous trips, Paul met the man Jesus. His whole mission in life was to free addicts like me from our sin addiction. He came to the house of sin to take us out. Like the man who went into the brothel to take Thandeka out of prostitution, He



came and lived amongst us sinners, so He could help us.

Sadly, even when He was in the house of sin, offering His help, some thought they did not need His help. Jesus Himself said, "I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners and need to repent."<sup>2</sup>

Paul came to his senses. He realised he needed help. He realised that his addiction was so strong that despite telling himself he would stop, he kept doing the very things he detested. In one of his letters he lamented his condition, "I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate."<sup>3</sup> Like most addicts who cannot resist another fix, Paul realised he couldn't help himself. Even when he was in rehab (some sinners call it church), the addiction remained so powerful he could have given up. But he realised Jesus was serious about helping him escape that life of sin.

#### What do you mean, set free?

"But there is another power within me that is at war with my mind. This power makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord. So you see how it is:

In my mind I really want to obey God's law, but because of my sinful nature I am a slave to sin."<sup>4</sup>

Like *dagga* or cocaine or heroin, this sin drug is addictive. You become a slave to it. Jesus warned about it. If you have seen an alcoholic

or drug addict, you will have realised that they are enslaved to their drug. They have lost control. Unless somebody offers them help, and unless they see they need help, they will perish by their addiction. When Jesus was offering help to some of the sin addicts like me, some thought they were not slaves to anything or anybody.

Jesus said to the people who believed in Him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

"But we are descendents of Abraham," they said. "We have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean, 'You will be set free?'"<sup>5</sup>

A drug addict is a slave to the drug. He no longer has freedom to decide whether to take the drug or not. In fact, the only real choice the drug addict has is to choose not to take the drug. The same applies to sinners as you see above. Paul lamented the fact that he knew he should not sin, yet he found himself doing exactly that which he did not want to do. "Jesus replied, 'I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin.'"<sup>6</sup>

Jesus became a human being to free humans from this slavery to sin. "For freedom did Christ set us free: stand fast therefore, and be not entangled again in

a yoke of bondage."<sup>7</sup> You see, when Jesus was born a human, He came to change our very humanity, so that we are no longer addicted to sin. He was able to live without sin, and never became a slave to it. He now offers that sin-free humanity to all human beings, for free. That's the good news Christians celebrate at Christmas.

#### Recovering addicts

About 25 years ago, I realised I was addicted to sin. I realised I was a sinner. Like Paul, I realised I needed help. Some recovering addicts told me there was a rehab centre they went to. They told me if I came along, I could be encouraged by those who were also trying to leave behind a life of sin. I started attending their meetings on Sundays. It has been tough going. I still sin from time to time, but Jesus told me I must focus on His life. He took my sinful life and made it His own, and He gave me His sinless life.

So the life I live now, I live by trusting in Jesus. This is a secret that seemed to help Paul. He said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."<sup>8</sup>

I have come to realise that in this addicted body, I

have no hope. But Jesus is transforming me. Sin has completely destroyed my body. I need a new one. Jesus has promised it. He came to live in me to help me fight my addiction. In the end, though, He will actually give me a brand new body, which will

*"You see, the truth is that  
Jesus has already set you free.  
It is knowing the truth that  
sets us free."*

no longer be enslaved to sin. He lived His whole life without sin. I can't wait for that day. I currently facilitate meetings of a rehab centre for sinners in Johannesburg. It is called Hope Christian Fellowship. It is commonly known as a church. There are many of these around the world. If you think you are an addict, you can join us in our walk. You can experience freedom.

You see, the truth is that Jesus has already set you free. It is knowing the truth that sets us free. If you can meet Jesus face to face, He will help you too. "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."<sup>9</sup> You do not have to do anything for Jesus to want to help you. In fact He died for me when I was still a sinner. "God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it."<sup>10</sup>

I know many people look down on addicts, even condemn them. But Jesus doesn't. He said He came to save sinners, not to condemn them. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."<sup>11</sup>

Have an addiction-free life through Jesus!

<sup>1</sup> Romans 5:12

<sup>2</sup> Luke 5:32

<sup>3</sup> Romans 7:15

<sup>4</sup> Romans 7:23–25

<sup>5</sup> John 8:31–33

<sup>6</sup> John 8:34

<sup>7</sup> Galatians 5:1

<sup>8</sup> Galatians 2:20

<sup>9</sup> John 8:32

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 2:8–9

<sup>11</sup> John 3:17

# Who do you say that I am?

When Jesus attended one of the annual festivals in Jerusalem the Jewish religious leaders wanted to kill Him because He said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. They accused Him of blasphemy, a crime worthy of death according to Old Testament law.

Their accusations prompted Jesus to give them four pieces of evidence that He truly was the Son of God. Let's look at what He said. It may strengthen our faith.

Before presenting the evidence, Jesus said, "If I testify about Myself, My testimony is not valid."<sup>1</sup> What did He mean by *that*? Was He in the habit of shading the truth? No, He was referring to the Old Testament requirement that guilt must be established based on the testimony of more than one witness.<sup>2</sup> When Jesus commented that His personal witness about Himself being not valid, He meant that it would take more than His own testimony to legally establish the matter of Him being the Father's Son.

Jesus then proceeded to tell them that the Father had given Him the power to resurrect people from the dead and to execute judgment—again equating Himself with God. This undoubtedly made the Jewish skeptics even more furious, since to them only God in person could do those things. Jesus certainly got their attention! Then He gave them four pieces of evidence that He truly was of divine origin.<sup>3</sup>

First, Jesus mentioned the preaching of John the Baptist who had attracted much interest by announcing the imminent coming of the long-awaited Messiah, the one who would bring salvation to all mankind.<sup>4</sup> Then when John saw Jesus coming to Him to be baptised, he recognised Him as the Messiah and proclaimed, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."<sup>5</sup> This was a clear and unmistakable introduction of Jesus as the Messiah.

Secondly, Jesus reminded the skeptics that the works He did bore witness that the Father had sent Him. His miracles spoke loud and clear. He had recently turned water into wine, healed a dying boy, and healed a man who had been lame for 38 years—miracles that could have been done only through the power of God.

Next Jesus reminded them that the Father Himself had claimed Jesus to be His Son. Matthew recorded what happened when Jesus was baptised. "As soon as Jesus was baptised, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on Him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love,



by  
**Paul Hailey**

with Him I am well pleased."<sup>6</sup>

Lastly, Jesus told them the scriptures testified of Him, the same Old Testament scriptures that the Jews knew so well, including the many prophecies that pointed to details in Jesus' life—a descendant of King David, born of a virgin, born in Bethlehem, His time spent in Egypt, living in Galilee and in Nazareth, announced by an Elijah-like messenger, teaching with parables, and rejection by the rulers. The Jews also were familiar with Old Testament verses foretelling that the Messiah would perform miraculous healings. The evidence of Jesus' divinity was clearly in front of them, but it seems that the Jewish legalistic, preconceived and faulty understanding of Old Testament scripture clouded their thinking from recognising Jesus for who He was, the Son of God. They expected a mighty national ruler who would deliver Israel from Roman domination, and



failed to understand that the Messiah would come to save the world in a much better and permanent way.

If *we* are unsure who Jesus was, we need to let go of preconceived ideas, and prayerfully scrutinise the evidence. When Jesus asked Peter "Who do *you* say I am?", Peter responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus then exclaimed, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven."<sup>7</sup> From this brief exchange we learn that understanding who Jesus is requires God's gift of spiritual

enlightenment. When we humbly and sincerely ask for spiritual discernment, God will graciously give it.

Jesus gave the Jewish skeptics four pieces of evidence that they rejected, due to their spiritual pride. Later in His ministry Jesus performed even mightier miracles such as raising the dead. The strongest proof was His own resurrection from the tomb. If His body had been stolen by enemies, as some claim, they most certainly would have discredited His resurrection by putting His body on display. If friends had stolen His body, as other skeptics claim, His followers would have known they were believing and teaching a lie. Also, they certainly would not have continued to face persecution and martyrdom if they had *any* doubt about Jesus' identity.

As the gospel writer Luke commented, Jesus left us many convincing proofs that He had been resurrected.<sup>8</sup> After walking out from His tomb He appeared to His

*continued on page 14*

# Seeing others as God sees them

Every Tuesday afternoon I meet with my “dream team” which consists of two other men, both of whom are serving in some ministry capacity apart from our own fellowship. We are working together to help each other discover God’s desires for our lives<sup>1</sup> and encouraging each other to live out those desires.

A couple of weeks ago, one of the guys mentioned at the end of our time together, that he was leaving that afternoon for a four-day trip to a distant city. He said he wasn’t looking forward to the trip because he didn’t like being with the people he was travelling with, didn’t like spending time with the people he was meeting and didn’t care for the purpose of the meetings. Needless to say he was not looking forward to the trip.

by  
**George Hart**

I had forgotten the conversation but when I saw him this past Tuesday the very first thing he said to me was how much he appreciated what I had told him and how it totally transformed his trip. Rather than seeing the people he was travelling with and meeting as objects of his distaste and dislike he saw them as people whom God loved. Rather than being annoyed by their conversation and behaviour he felt love, concern and compassion. The people or circumstances didn’t change but his view of them did and it transformed his trip.

My first thought was, “That was pretty good advice, perhaps I should live by it myself.” Perhaps we all should because it is true. How would it transform



As I sat there listening to him I happened to see through the window two men on the top of an apartment building about a quarter of a mile away. I asked him to look out the window and take a look at those men. Then I said, “I don’t have a clue who they are, or what they are doing on that roof, or where they are in life, but one thing I can tell you with absolute certainty about them is that God is somehow and somehow working in their lives. And the same is true for everyone you travel with, sit next to on the plane, bump into at the baggage claim and meet with in another city. I don’t have a clue who any of those people are but one thing I can tell you about them with absolute certainty is God is working in their lives.”

<sup>1</sup> Psalms 37:4

our day if we approached it knowing that everyone we came in contact with, God was working in his or her life? How would it change the way we view each person? What if we saw ourselves as agents through whom God could work to make a difference in their lives?

You may not know a great deal about people, but there is one thing you can know with absolute certainty, and that is they are *included* in God’s love and life and He is actively working in their lives. They may not even know it, but we know it! I’m going to take my own good advice and try to live each day with that truth. □

# Who will

Scripture tells us that Jesus will return to judge all nations and peoples—the living and the dead.<sup>1</sup> He will save and reward the righteous and condemn and punish the unrighteous. The saved will inherit heaven and the unsaved will be cast into hell.<sup>2</sup>

So who will be saved and who will not be saved? Is there any hope for the unsaved? This article answers these and other related questions. But let's first explain what *saved* and *unsaved* mean.

## Meaning of *saved* and *unsaved*

The Bible uses the words *saved* and *unsaved* in a different sense than what we are used to. The word *saved* means being with God, living and participating in His abundant life. It means experiencing His love,



by  
**Dr. P.  
Sellappan**

## God's judgment

In the final judgment, at the second coming of Jesus, the saved will inherit heaven [God's kingdom] and will participate in His glory. The unsaved will be given opportunity to hear the Gospel and repent of their unbelief. If they repent, they too will inherit heaven; but if they don't, they will be cast into hell where they will experience shame, fear, guilt and anguish. Hell is living a life apart from or alienation from God.

Scripture tells us that all human beings will die once—physically—but the same all will be raised to immortality.<sup>4</sup> Jesus came to abolish death for all people forever.<sup>5</sup> That means both the saved and the unsaved will live forever—either in hell or in heaven. The saved will be *spiritually alive*; they will experience God's



joy, peace, assurance, freedom, passion and friendship. It means enjoying an intimate relationship with Him, knowing Him as He truly is—as our loving Father, Saviour and Companion. It means being in union and communion with Him. It means experiencing *heaven* and being *spiritually alive*. This is what *saved* means. This is what everyone desires and seeks.

The word *unsaved* means being *estranged* or *alienated*<sup>3</sup> (not separated) from God—living a life filled with fear, anxiety, loneliness, confusion, shame, guilt and self-condemnation. It means not experiencing God's love, joy, peace, assurance and friendship. It means experiencing *hell* and being *spiritually dead*. This is what *unsaved* means. This is what everyone dreads and wants to avoid.

abundant life. The unsaved will be *spiritually dead*; they will experience hell.

God loves both the saved and the unsaved—*equally*. His grace and unconditional love applies to both groups. The difference between the two is in the *kind of life* they will live. The saved believe the truth [Jesus]; they know who God is, and who they are in Christ [children of God]. They enjoy their new life in Christ. The unsaved reject the truth, so they suffer in their own *self-made* hell.

## Is there hope for the unsaved?

Those in heaven will never want to return to the hell that they came from. They wouldn't want to exchange the glory, freedom, peace, joy and abundance they

# be saved?

have in Christ. Why would anybody trade their good life for a miserable one? Only the sad, confused and tormented people commit suicide. The happy ones want to go on living forever. Eternal life with God is millions of time more glorious than our earthly life. Nobody in his right mind will ever want to give up such a good life. Ask any billionaire, intellectual, talented, powerful or beautiful person if they would like to give up what they have even for a couple of years? You bet no one will!

What about those in hell—those who live a sad, lonely, depressed and tormented life? Surely, they want a better life, if only they could discover it. So is there any hope for them? Or has God shut and sealed the doors of heaven forever? Does God delight in seeing His

to them, they will gladly accept and return to their Father's home where there is plenty for everybody. That is how great and generous our God is.

Heaven's gates will never be shut. They will be open day and night<sup>7</sup> and the Water of Life [Holy Spirit] will continue to flow to the nations bringing healing,<sup>8</sup> even to those in hell. The Spirit and the bride [the Church] will continue to woo them.<sup>9</sup> God's love will continue to flow to the unbelieving until they come to their senses, repent of their unbelief and get out of their self-imposed hell! *While God gives them personal freedom, it is also His hope that all will eventually repent and accept His salvation.*



children suffer forever? In the story of the prodigal son, did the father [picturing our heavenly Father] wish his son [picturing us] to suffer forever because he wasted his family inheritance? Even human parents, as sinful as they are, will never want their children to suffer for all eternity. God is infinitely more gracious to His children than our human parents.

God's love is unfailing and unending<sup>6</sup>—it never stops flowing even to those in hell. The Holy Spirit will continue to blaze through hell seeking to save the lost [the unbelieving], no matter how long it takes. Our heavenly Father will wait patiently for all His prodigal sons and daughters to return home even if it takes a thousand years (which is nothing compared to eternity). The chances are, when God's truth is revealed

## Two Bible stories

There are two stories in the Bible which illustrate beautifully how one might cross over from hell to heaven. One is the story of Ancient Israel and the other is the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

### *Ancient Israelite law*<sup>10</sup>

God instructed Ancient Israel to construct cities of refuge where a *manslayer* (one who killed someone *unintentionally*) could flee without getting killed by the victim's relative (*avenger*). These cities were served with good and well-labelled roads so that the manslayer could escape to one of these cities without getting killed. The *gates to these cities were open day and night* so that he could run for protection at

any time. The cities had limited provisions to keep him alive. But *life in these cities was constrained, like our refugee camps today*. The manslayer still had to face a *murder charge* as he had killed an *innocent* person. The only way he could get out of the city and return to freedom was *when the nation's high priest died*. The high priest's death gave him amnesty [pardon]. All charges against him were dropped and he could return to a life of freedom.

Like the manslayer, we too had killed an innocent man—Jesus Christ—ignorantly.<sup>11</sup> *Our avenger—sin—had sent us to hell—to a life of misery*. But our High Priest Jesus had died for us and has given us divine pardon. He took our sin upon Himself and died on the cross so that we might receive forgiveness. His death makes it possible for us (the guilty party) to cross over from our hell to God's heaven—from a guilt-ridden, sad and constrained life to a life of freedom, joy and peace. *We need not languish in hell anymore*. Our High Priest had already died [taking our sinful humanity with Him] and has secured our freedom. He has risen and given us a new life. Like the manslayer, we too can now return to a life of freedom.

#### **Lazarus and the rich man**<sup>12</sup>

In this story, the rich man was in great torment [hell] and he desperately wanted to cross over to Lazarus' heaven. Jesus told him that the gulf separating his hell and Lazarus' heaven was too vast and it was *impossible* for him to cross on his own. But Jesus hinted that if he wished he could *piggyback on Him if only he knew who He was—the One who descended into our hell, defeated it, ascended to heaven, and has given us His perfect humanity as a free gift so that we are fit for heaven*.

These two stories tell us how we too can cross over from our hell to God's heaven.

#### **The straight and narrow gate**

Adam's sin brought death [hell] to all humanity. But Jesus entered our hell, assumed our sinful humanity and nailed it to the cross. *Thus He destroyed and abolished our death forever*. He rose from His death, ascended to heaven and crossed the great chasm separating hell and heaven. We are invited to piggyback on Jesus to heaven. There is no need for any of us to languish in hell. We can say 'good riddance' to hell and cross over to God's heaven where there

are pleasures forevermore. *Jesus, the God-Man, is the Bridge—the only Bridge by which we can cross over from hell to heaven*. That's why we are called to enter through the *straight and narrow gate* [Jesus]. The broad gates of religion, law, works and human philosophy can *never* take us to heaven.

#### **Come enjoy heaven**

The Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—loves us so much that He will never let us perish eternally. While He gives us freedom to choose life or death [heaven or hell], He also gives us every opportunity to return home [heaven].

*God created us for adoption.<sup>13</sup> He created us in love and for love, to share His overflowing love with us*. He yearns for us to be with Him and participate in His abundant life. He wants us to experience His overflowing love, life, peace, joy and excitement. *To prove His love for us once and for all, He has chosen not to be God without us (because Jesus has become human for us for all eternity)*. *That's a very strong statement—well, that's how strong God's love is for us*.

Jesus has done everything necessary for our inclusion in the life of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. His final words on the cross were: "It is finished." Mission accomplished. Salvation is now open to all people everywhere. God is even now sending His Holy Spirit to open our eyes and ears and hearts to the truth about who He is, and who we are so that we might gladly welcome and embrace our new life in Christ.

God is calling us to a heavenly life where everyone is given respect, honour and dignity, where everyone will be given the opportunity to use their individual talents and gifts to attain their full potential, where everyone works together on exciting universe-wide projects, where everyone has their being in union and communion with God and with one another. Heaven is a family affair. It is what God's kingdom is all about.

Heaven is the happening place. It is where all the fun is. It is for those who want a never-ending, glorious, exciting life. And the good news is: *all* are included, even you. What say you? □

<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 4:1

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 25: 31,34,41,46

<sup>3</sup> Colossians 1:21

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:52–53

<sup>5</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:54–55; Revelation 20:13

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:8

<sup>7</sup> Revelation 21:25

<sup>8</sup> Revelation 22: 1–5

<sup>9</sup> Revelation 22:17

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 21; Numbers 35; Deuteronomy 19

<sup>11</sup> Acts 3:15

<sup>12</sup> Luke 16:19–31

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 1: 3–14

*continued from page 10*

disciples and other individuals at least ten recorded times. He talked with them, and ate with them. He appeared to over 500 people at one time, many of whom were still alive when the Apostle Paul recorded this event.<sup>9</sup> If His resurrection had been a fake, it would have been easily refuted.

Jesus does not want you or me to have doubts about His identity. The Apostle Thomas was a loyal follower of Jesus, but he did have some doubts, even after hearing reports that Jesus had been resurrected. Jesus removed those doubts when He appeared to Thomas and invited Him to examine the wounds in His hands and side where He had been pierced. Thomas saw the unmistakable scars and cried out, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, 'Because you have seen

<sup>1</sup> John 5:31

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 17: 2–7

<sup>3</sup> John 5:32–39

<sup>4</sup> Luke 3:2–6

<sup>5</sup> John 1:29

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 3:16, 17

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 16: 15–17

<sup>8</sup> Acts 1:3

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 15: 3–8

<sup>10</sup> John 20:27–29

<sup>11</sup> John 20:30

me, you have believed, blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."<sup>10</sup>

Jesus invites us all to examine the evidence. It is a blessing to be convinced that Jesus is the Son of God, our Lord and our Saviour. We are not able to see Him in person, but the evidence is in Scripture. The Apostle John commented towards the end of His gospel, "Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have (eternal) life in His name."<sup>11</sup>

It is our prayer that you too, examine the evidence and come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. □

# At 2:30 in the morning

For the past few years I have been involved in projects in my field of work that required me to spend about a week in a hotel in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur. Each year I get to meet up with many individuals in the field of education from various states in Malaysia. One of the most enjoyable aspects of this project is the chance to get together with friends whom I could only meet here. This year we were placed in a comfortable hotel in the heart of the city. Our work required long hours that extended into late nights but we enjoyed being together.

After we had completed our tasks for the day we would normally take a walk at night just to relax. A glass of hot tea in a restaurant is a fine way to wind down after a stressful day. One particular night both my roommate and I could not sleep. So we decided to do something strange. We went out for a glass of tea at 2.30 in the morning! We were not worried as there are always some 24-hour stalls nearby.

As we stepped out of the hotel we were struck by the calm and silence we encountered. Few cars passed by, the streets were quiet and we had never seen the city this empty. As we walked along the road, towards a tea stall about a few hundred metres away, I began to notice things. There were shadows at the corners of each building that we passed. Looking more intently I could see individuals walking aimlessly at the dark corridors of every building.

These men were clothed in filthy and torn clothes, looking utterly unkempt and staring into the night. They were the vagrants who appeared when everyone else was asleep. While we slept in the hotel, these men slept on cardboard pieces out in the cold. Most of them were high on drugs, talking to themselves. One was speaking loudly; pouring out his pains and anguish but no one was listening.

As we walked further we saw some provocatively and scantily dressed individuals. They looked like women but something was different about them. Soon we could see that they were transsexuals or transvestites who because of circumstances that we could never imagine or understand, were reduced to selling their bodies on these streets. Finally we got to the tea stall.



by  
**Devaraj  
Ramoo**

There were others there also having a drink or a meal but what caught my eye was the night club situated a few metres away. As my friend and I sipped our tea we saw the individuals that went in and came out. Young girls, about the age of the students that I teach were accompanying men. These were the social escorts or prostitutes being picked up and taken away, probably to other places of night entertainment. My heart was filled with pain and pity to see these things. These young girls could be condemned as being immoral; the transsexuals could be condemned as being an affront to decency and nature. The vagrants could be condemned as 'good for nothing' or more bluntly as the scum of the earth. Most of us would want nothing

to do with these types of people. Strangely so many people love to watch movies about characters that make their presence felt only at night. There seems to be a craze among moviegoers to watch vampires in love as one hit movie series seems to portray. But who cares about the ones who really are out there at night when everyone else is in the comfort of their homes.

Behind every individual I saw that night is a heartbreaking story. Have we ever considered the fact that the prostitutes could be breadwinners for their families? Some are looking after aged parents and siblings. Some are mothers to little children. Society doesn't provide food on the table for their families. Extremely difficult circumstances may have

driven them to this. The transsexuals have been condemned, laughed at, ostracised and ridiculed all their lives. I've seen it happen many times. Some self-righteous religious people say such people should be locked up and rehabilitated. What about the vagrants? Did they choose to be that way? Some had been successful people until tragic things happened in their lives. They made wrong decisions that led them to a living hell. There are so many of them, all appearing only when the city sleeps. They have been used, abused, tormented, condemned, beaten and ridiculed. The average person has no pity or concern for them. But that is not the way God sees them.

*continued on page 16*

# Feelings of failure

The first time I lost a job was when I was 16 years old. I thought I was a good worker, so I was surprised to be called into the manager's office and told I was being fired. He said I was talking too much to other employees and it was affecting everyone's work.

I felt like a complete failure. Even though my mum told me that things would work out, that it was a good lesson for me, and that I'd have lots of jobs during my lifetime, I couldn't stop feeling miserable. I didn't want to set foot in that McDonald's again or ever see that manager again.

My Dad had other ideas. A few weeks after I was fired, he took us to the same McDonald's to eat. When the manager saw me, he came over and asked me if I wanted my job back. The other managers and supervisors told him he had fired the wrong person.

Yes, I was talking a lot, but I worked while I talked, and many of them considered me one of their hardest workers. He said he realised it wasn't my fault others would stop working while we talked, and he wanted me to come back to work. I took the job and worked harder than ever to show my thanks for his faith in me. And I tried not to talk as much.

by  
**Rick  
Shallenberger**

Looking back, I can chuckle over the experience. But I certainly wasn't chuckling at the time, and I'll never forget that feeling of failure and worthlessness.

I've had that same feeling in my spiritual life. For most of my life I tried to be a good Christian and not sin—knowing full well, deep down, that I was not a “good” Christian and that I was still sinning. I prayed

in embarrassment, shame and frustration, believing I was a spiritual failure and likely to remain so. At times I was too depressed to pray. I believed I wasn't worthy to be called a child of God.

Much like my fear of facing my McDonald's manager, I feared facing God. Imagine my relief when I finally learned that God, in fact, loves me unconditionally and doesn't condemn me. I am in Christ and Christ is in me. And nothing can change that. God's



love will never end, and in Christ, I will continue to grow into it more deeply forever.

Many are fearful of God because of their mistakes and failures. They've been taught that God is harsh and judgmental. But you and I can show them a different God—the true God, who loves them unconditionally and wants them to know they are wanted and included in Jesus Christ. □

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 139:1–10

*continued from page 15*

When Jesus walked the earth, there were people just like these in the cities and towns that He went through. On one occasion He went to eat at a Pharisee's house where a woman regarded as a sinner appeared. She began to wash His feet with fragrant oil and wipe them with her hair. The host murmured that if Jesus was really a prophet, then He would know what kind of woman was washing His feet, referring to the woman's morality.<sup>1</sup> On another occasion Jesus was condemned as a glutton and a drunk for being friends with tax collectors and sinners.<sup>2</sup> It may be a surprise to many that Jesus revealed that He was the Messiah to a Samaritan woman at a well who had had five husbands and was now living with another man out of wedlock.<sup>3</sup> It is we who are quick to condemn others. Jesus came

for everyone. Not one human being is ignored. His sacrifice to redeem us from sin and to bless us with eternal life is for all people. While we may condemn and turn our faces away, Jesus looks at these outcasts of society differently. He said, “It's not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”<sup>4</sup>

For a start we can pray for those tormented individuals that have to live such difficult lives. I thank God for the caring souls who meet these outcasts and offer them shelters, counselling, assistance and friendship. As my friend and I walked back to our hotel I knew that I had been made aware and reminded of how much people need Christ, a lesson learnt at 2.30 in the morning. □

<sup>1</sup> Luke 7:36–50

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 11:19

<sup>3</sup> John 4:3–42

<sup>4</sup> Mark 2:17



# If it walks like a duck

“Suppose you see a bird walking around in a farm yard. This bird has no label that says ‘duck’. But the bird certainly looks like a duck. Also, he goes to the pond and you notice that he swims like a duck. Then he opens his beak and quacks like a duck. Well, by this time you have probably reached the conclusion that the bird is a duck, whether he’s wearing a label or not.”

This statement was made by Richard Cunningham Patterson Jr, the American ambassador to Guatemala during the Cold War in 1950. He used this phrase when he accused Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán’s government of being communists. The point that Patterson was trying to make in this instance was that although Guzmán’s government claimed not to be communists, everything that they did pointed to the fact that they were indeed communists.<sup>1</sup>

The ‘duck test’ is a humorous example of a form of inductive reasoning, which can be applied to determine if someone or something is what they claim to be.

So let’s say for example that I claim to be the biggest supporter that the Western Province Stormers have ever had. If you asked me when the last time was that the Stormers made it to a Super Rugby final and I could not tell you, you would start to doubt me. If you then enquired as to when the last time was that I went to watch a live match and I replied four years ago, your doubts would escalate. What then if you asked what I thought of their last game and I replied that the last time I watched a televised game was two years ago? You would surely ask yourself if I could really be called a supporter at all. If finally, you enquired about my favourite Stormers player and I replied that it is Jacque Kallis, well then you would know I was lying through my teeth... not only was I not the biggest Stormers fan at all, I actually had no idea what was happening in local rugby... never mind the fact that Jacques Kallis is actually a cricketer.

## The big question

If someone had to use inductive reasoning to look at your life, would they be able to conclude that you are an authentic Christian? Surely if you say you are a Christian, you should talk like one and act like one.

To answer the question truthfully, we first have to be able to determine what a Christian is, but before I go on, it is very important to note that this article is not intended to be a measuring stick to determine if you will be eligible for salvation.

Salvation is only possible through faith in Jesus, who has already paid for our sins through unmerited grace. The focus of this article is not about pointing fingers at others to determine the authenticity of their beliefs, but rather an opportunity for introspection.

## But what is a Christian?

So what makes you a Christian? Is it belief in God? Is it

by  
**Shaun de  
Greeff**



Biblical knowledge or going to church on Sunday? Is it someone who has faith or does good deeds?

We find our first clue in the New Testament when Jesus deals with this very issue by trying to enlighten the Pharisees. In Mathew 22:36–40, He explains to them that the greatest command is to love: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbour as yourself.”

Love, as you will discover, is the key to everything. A Christian should firstly love God and have a relationship with Him. Someone who for example prays regularly, does Bible Study and goes to church would clearly be demonstrating that he loves God. It is impossible to say that you are a Christian and not love God; the two are not mutually exclusive. Someone for example who does not believe that Jesus is his Lord and Saviour, is not an authentic Christian.

Secondly we are commanded to love our neighbours as ourselves. Romans 12:10 says it so eloquently: “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.”

This concept of loving our neighbours as ourselves is a very hard pill to swallow and we often find a way to rationalise our actions. We treat people badly, ignore them, gossip about them, hurt them and then get to church on Sundays and wonder why the seats are empty. We profess that Jesus loves the beggar, but we can't take the time out of our day to speak to that beggar. We rationalise that giving

him money will only reinforce his bad behaviour, but it is too much effort to buy him a loaf of bread. I find the parable of the Good Samaritan especially disconcerting because I doubt I would put my life on the line for someone else if put in the same position.

And yet deep down inside me I have to realise that I cannot profess to love my neighbour and then neglect him. If I really want to be more like Jesus I need to love my fellow man.

### Preach the gospel

We find our next clue in Mathew 28:19–20 where Jesus commands His disciples to spread the gospel: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

In stark contrast with the Old Testament where the duty of preaching and teaching fell on the shoulders of the religious leaders, the weight of spreading the gospel now becomes the duty of every Christian. We might like to think that it is the responsibility of our pastors to go out there and spread the good news, but

if you profess to be a Christian your words and actions should reflect the gospel message. The Old Testament was the day of the priest. Today is the priesthood of all believers—that's all of us.<sup>2</sup>

### Do good deeds

The last point revolves around how we must help other people by doing good deeds. It ties in very strongly with loving your neighbour but is worth a mention on its own. “In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”<sup>3</sup> And in 1 Timothy 6:18: “Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.”

As Christians, when we show other people unconditional love and help them, we reflect the awesome gift that Christ has given us. When people see you doing this kind of thing without any hidden agendas or motives, and you confess that it is Christ in you that has made the change, they will believe that Jesus really can make a difference.

### But isn't faith enough for the Duck Test?

A person might argue that faith is the only requirement for salvation and that we don't need this touchy feely mumbo-jumbo. All I need is to believe, right? That is correct. All you need for salvation is faith, but bear in mind that with true faith comes the desire to become more like Christ. If you really do believe, you will have a desire to do the things that God has commanded, and that belief will

*“If we love God and our neighbours as much as ourselves, we will do good deeds, live and share the good news and be the type of people God wants us to be.”*

translate into action.

The Apostle James addressed this issue in James 1:22: “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” And in James 2:18 he says: “But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?”

### Walk in love

There are many Christian attributes I have not mentioned here. The beatitudes and fruits of the Spirit immediately come to mind, but ultimately they all stem from love. If we love God and our neighbours as much as ourselves, we will do good deeds, live and share the good news and be the type of people God wants us to be. The Apostle Paul said that if we have no love, we are like a clanging cymbal, in other words, we just make noise and do nothing. We are therefore useless.

So, if you love like Christ did, live the gospel like Christ did, have a relationship with the Father, like Christ did... well then you can't be a duck... you have to be a Christian! ☐

<sup>1</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duck\\_test](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duck_test)

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 2:9

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 5:16

# How much is freedom worth?

Jesus once helped a woman who had been held captive 12 years by a health problem that had made her ritually unclean. How important was this problem to her? She had spent all her money seeking a cure.<sup>1</sup> It was worth everything she had. Women didn't ordinarily touch rabbis, but she reached out and touched Jesus—and Jesus gave her freedom. It cost her nothing, but it was worth *everything!*

Contrast that for a moment with *the ancient Israelites*, who were in slavery in Egypt. They wanted freedom, too, and they could not buy their way out. They suffered and groaned, and God heard their cry. He delivered them with amazing miracles. It cost them nothing, but how much was it worth to them? *Not much, it seems.* Although God set them free, they preferred a golden calf. They preferred the unholy fire, murmuring and self-centredness. They grumbled about the person God was using to lead them. They grumbled about God, their food, and life itself.

Let's go back to the New Testament, where Christ again set people free—free from spiritual bondage of sin and death.<sup>2</sup> How much did it cost? It was incredibly expensive. It cost God the Son His life, and all of the suffering He endured that we might have eternal life. The benefits of His sacrifice are *given* to us.

Freedom is given to us without charge, because we are unable to pay. How much is it worth to us? *Our entire lives*, of course. "He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him."<sup>3</sup> We are to give our entire lives to Him in service, as living sacrifices.<sup>4</sup>

In the church of God, *people are being set free!* Free from the fear of "not making it" into the kingdom of God. Free from rules that God does not require us to keep. Free from rules that tempt us to condemn other Christians. Each of us may examine our own hearts to see how much we value this freedom.

It is thrilling to see that many have responded with enthusiastic *worship and support*. But it is sad when it seems that some people are afraid of the wilderness and look for the comforts of Egypt. It is just as sad when some try to enter the promised land on their own, or sit in the desert by themselves.

Christ has given us freedom, and He used human beings to bring that about, and people respond to that in different ways. Some rejoice, and some do not. I suppose that there will always be reasons to complain about the imperfections of leaders, the food or the music. But some are *quietly working* to build the kingdom of God.

The old covenant had many obligations. It specified a certain amount of time, a certain amount of money, numerous rules about behaviour, and many sacrifices for worship. Those requirements teach us something about God and the relationship we have with Him.



by  
**Dr. Joseph  
Tkach**



*continued on page 20*

# Never alone

I'm the kind of person who enjoys time alone—time to think and recharge. But being truly alone isn't a good feeling. I once went in for a surgical procedure and as I was being wheeled through the hallway, I experienced utter aloneness. No friends or family could go in with me. I was surrounded by strangers who had my life in their hands. It was a minor procedure, but minor or not, the feeling was there.

None of us likes to be alone, at least not in the true sense. Our friends and families give us a sense of belonging and the comfort of help in time of need. Sometimes even the presence of strangers can be comforting. It's a bit unnerving to walk into a place that should be filled with people to find it empty. It makes you wonder if a movie-type disaster of some kind occurred and you're the only one left!

In reality, we are never alone. We often pray for God to be with us or with others, but it's not necessary if we remember He is always with us. Jesus lives His life in the hearts of believers so there's never a time when His presence isn't closer than a breath or heartbeat. I've stopped praying for God to be with those for whom I'm praying, as I realise He's already there, loving and taking care of them. It would be sad indeed if God had to wait for us to pray before He could intervene in people's lives.

What about those who claim to have gone through

by  
**Tammy Tkach**

a long, dark night of the soul? Even though we can't argue with experience, we can question the premise that would lead people to believe God has abandoned them. Does God leave us on our own for periods of time to teach lessons or test us? If He truly lives in us, how could this happen? Our lives are completely intertwined with His and couldn't be separated without our complete and utter decimation! Just as a parent wouldn't leave a child alone to cry and flounder helplessly, neither does God leave us alone. The Holy Spirit teaches us by leading and guiding, not by abandoning us to our own devices and the pitfalls of life.

"But what about Jesus?" some will ask. Didn't God desert Him at His most vulnerable and when He needed His Father most? Jesus asked, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?"<sup>1</sup> These were the first words of Psalm 22, which the Jews would have known—and they also would have known the rest. Verse 24 says: "For He has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; He has not hidden His face from Him but has listened to His cry for help."

God did not abandon Jesus on the cross. He was right there with Him as He took on all the sin of the world. He never abandons us, not even for short periods. He truly is God with us—all the time. □

<sup>1</sup> Psalms 22:1;  
Matthew 27:46;  
Mark 15:34

*continued from page 19*

As we all know, God no longer requires animal sacrifices—but that does not mean that He no longer requires us to make *any* sacrifices. The demands are now *more profound than ever*. God no longer requires all the same rules of behaviour—but He still gives many commands regarding our behaviour, and more importantly, about our *hearts*.

Of course, God no longer has the same rules about money—now, His exhortations are more profound than ever. Do we resent God's claim on "our" money? Some do. Some say that no one is good enough to be given God's money. In a way, that is true, but then that would mean that no one is good enough to keep God's money, either. If we as Christians *keep* all our money, we are not responding to *freedom* the way the New Testament describes we should.

And what about time? God no longer specifies exactly when people must set aside time for Him, but we all need to spend time with the Lord.

God brought the Israelites out of Egypt so that they could *serve Him*. Jesus gives us freedom so that we can *serve Him*. The freedom comes with responsibility.

How much is freedom worth to us?

Thousands of people are rejoicing in the freedom

Jesus is bringing to people through the gospel message. You probably know many of them. And yet you probably know quite a few people who still have not accepted that freedom. Please do not abandon them in their time of need. Help us continue to reach out, despite our imperfections, with the message of freedom in Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

You may have seen specific people profoundly transformed by God's grace. Perhaps you have experienced sessions in which people begin to grasp the depth and width and height of God's love for them. This experience is one of our greatest joys.

If you cannot see the joy of burdens being lifted, if you cannot see the peace of anxieties released, be assured that freedom is indeed ringing around the world. Ask God to help you see it. Ask Him to bless the results of your work and ours. Pray for us so that our priorities might be drawn yet closer to the heart of God. Pray for your brothers and sisters who need to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. □

<sup>1</sup> Mark 5:25–29  
<sup>2</sup> Hebrew 2:14–15  
<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians  
5:15  
<sup>4</sup> Romans 12:1

Make it clear. Make it simple. Emphasise the essentials. Forget about impressing. Leave some things unsaid. Let the thing be simplified.

**Charles R. Swindoll**

A youth is a person who is going to carry on what you have started. He will assume control of your cities, states, and nations. He is going to take over your churches, schools, and corporations. You may adopt all the policies you please, but how they are carried out depends on him. So it might be well to pay him some attention.

**Author unknown**

There is not enough darkness in the world to extinguish the light of one small candle.

**Spanish proverb**

Never think you could do something if only you had a different lot and sphere assigned you. What you call hindrances, obstacles, discouragements, are probably God's opportunities.

**Horace Bushnell**

"I'm a self-made man, you know," explained a certain magnate of modern business to Dr. Joseph Parker, who immediately replied, "Sir, you have lifted a great load of responsibility from the Almighty."

**John Baillie**

I expect to pass through life but once. If therefore, there be any kindness that I can show, or any good thing I can do to any fellow being, let me do it now,

**The Bank of Time!**

Imagine there is a bank that credits your account each morning with \$86,400. It carries over no balance from day to day. Every evening it deletes whatever part of the balance you failed to use that day. What would you do? Draw out every cent of course! Each of us has such a bank. Its name is TIME! Every night it writes off as lost whatever you failed to invest to good purpose. It carries no balance, allows no overdraft. Each day it opens a new account for you. Each night it burns the remains of the day. If you fail to use the day's deposits, the loss is yours. There is no going back. There is no "drawing" against tomorrow. You must live in the present on today's deposits. Invest it so as to get the most in health, happiness and success! The clock is running. Make the most of it today.

To realise the value of one year, ask the student who failed an exam.

To realise the value of one week, ask the editor of a weekly newspaper.

To realise the value of one day, ask a daily wage earner with kids to feed.

To realise the value of one hour, ask the lovers who are waiting to meet.

To realise the value of one minute, ask the guy who missed the train.

To realise the value of one second, ask the person who just avoided an accident.

To realise the value of one millisecond, ask the athlete who got a silver medal at the Olympics.

Treasure every moment you have. Remember that time waits for no one.

Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, and today is a gift: that's why it's called the present!

and not defer or neglect it, as I shall not pass this way again.

**Stephen Grellet**

Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.

**St. Francis of Assisi**

It is not the outward storms and stresses of life that defeat and

disrupt personality, but its inner conflicts and miseries. If a man is happy and stable at heart, he can normally cope, even with zest, with difficulties that lie outside his personality.

**J.B. Phillips**

The deepest principle of human nature is the craving to be appreciated.

**William James**

*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!*

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40800 Shah Alam,  
Selangor, Malaysia.*

# In Jesus' n

Prayers often end with these three words, “in Jesus’ name”.<sup>1</sup> What do we mean when we say that? This phrase, “in Jesus’ name”, certainly is not a magical phrase or a formal conclusion to our prayers. By adding “in Jesus’ name” doesn’t make a prayer holier or better. Although it may sound sacrilegious, we do not have to end a prayer with these three words. As a matter of fact, when Jesus taught us the Lord’s Prayer,<sup>2</sup> this phrase is nowhere to be found.

The Christian community learned this phrase from Peter<sup>3</sup> and other New Testament contemporaries. There is another place in Acts where this idea is being used. The scenario was that Peter and John were arrested and were on trial in front of rulers, elders and high priests that were very skeptical about the new teaching on a fellow Jew called Jesus. Hence they began to ask Peter, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?” After a rather long explanation, Peter answers, “...by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified.”<sup>4</sup> From this account, we can get an idea of how this phrase is being used. When the rulers and elders asked “In what name have you done this?”, they are in other words asking, “By whose authority are you doing this?” or “Who gave you the permission to do this?”. As we apply this to our prayer life, we learn that when we pray “in Jesus’ name”, all we are saying is that this prayer is prayed according to God’s will and permission.

Let’s take another example. When we use a company’s name, we use a company’s authority or permission. Whatever that follows is usually a contract or business that is consistent with the company’s values and points of interest. Likewise, when we use Jesus’ name to pray, we are praying things that are consistent with His character, His will and His nature. Thus, to pray, “Lord Jesus, help me to say this lie in a way that I won’t get caught, in Jesus’ name, Amen” makes the prayer void because we are not praying according to Jesus’ values. Instead of reducing this to a formula, we can use other words like, “Jesus, may this prayer be according to Your will, and if it is so, so be it (which is translated into Amen)”. Another way we can express this phrase is by saying, “I don’t have authority to pray these things, but Jesus You gave me the authority and I can boldly pray and petition these things. In Your authority my prayer is being offered.”

May this remind us that prayer does not consist of repetitive and flowery words, but prayer always comes from our heart. Jesus is more interested with what we mean than what we say. Praying in Jesus’ name therefore means to pray according to God’s will and character. □

by  
Ju Lynn  
Tucay

<sup>1</sup> John 14:13–14,  
15:16, 16:23

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 6:9–13

<sup>3</sup> Acts 3:6

<sup>4</sup> Acts 4:7–10

<sup>5</sup> John 14:13

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 18:  
19–20

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 18:5



# ame, amen

## Reflections on why our prayers matter

by Rick Shallenberger

I've spent most of my life ending my prayers with, "In Jesus' name, Amen." It was what I was taught, and truth be told, I almost looked at it as a sort of magic formula. If I wanted God to hear me, I prayed, "In Jesus' name." If I didn't pray in His name, I couldn't be sure God would honour my request.

After all, Jesus said, "Whatever you ask in my name I will do...."<sup>5</sup> Somehow, though, I don't think this is about merely saying the right words to end our prayers. I think it's more about being in positive fellowship with Jesus.

Jesus told us when two or more are gathered in His name, He is present;<sup>6</sup> and "Whoever welcomes a child in My name, welcomes Me."<sup>7</sup> I think that praying in Jesus' name is praying in the same spirit and heart as Jesus would pray, that is, a heart of love, of kindness, forgiveness, mercy and hope.

I think it's also acknowledging that we come to the throne of the Father because Jesus is the one who takes us there. It's also acknowledging that we want God's will to be done and not merely our own.

It's never wrong to end a prayer with "In Jesus' name" of course. It's a reminder that our lives, our worship and our requests are all centred on Him. At the same time, it's not essential to end a prayer by saying these exact words. What is essential is that our heart is oriented toward and centred on Jesus—on who He is for us and who we are to Him.

Jesus is focused on us, even on all those who don't yet know Him as the one who loves them, forgives them and reconciles them to the Father.

So now when I end my prayers with "In Jesus' name", I mean a whole lot more than just some little set of magic words. I'm reminding myself that Jesus is right there with me, taking up my feeble little prayers as His own, redeeming them and presenting them to the Father.

What peace, what rest, what hope! Jesus is my all in all, even in my prayers.

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