

Plain Truth

A Magazine Of Christian Understanding

Apr-Jun 2011

The meaning of the sacraments

p.5

Are you and I good enough?

p.8

Parents, are you with your children?

p.15



PP 12578/03/2012 (029371)

Celebrating 10th anniversary

Time flies! With this issue, THE PLAIN TRUTH enters the 10th year of production in Klang, Malaysia. It started with a circulation of about 2,000 copies and has steadily increased to 20,000 today—a tenfold increase. The cost of printing and mailing too has increased proportionately—from around RM4,000 to RM40,000 per issue!

God saw a need for this magazine, perhaps to unite us in our understanding of God's truth. So He called a small team of 30 members with scarce resources to start this teaching ministry. THE PLAIN TRUTH is devoted to sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ to as many people as possible. Our goal is to present the Gospel as plainly as possible so that all *can know* who God is, who they are, and why they are here on planet earth.

We thank God for allowing us to participate in this ministry—sharing the Good News with thousands of Malaysians, Singaporeans and others throughout the world through our website.

We like to believe that God is throwing 5 spiritual banquets (issues) a year. We hope you enjoy the banquets as we do. Some articles (dishes) are meaty and you need to read (and re-read) to grasp them. Some are easy to read and digest. And there are always desserts to cap it all.

While the Gospel itself is free, it does cost money to print and mail each copy. That's why we need your support—your money (actually God's), your prayers, your sharing the Gospel with others. It is a joint effort and all our effort is really a participation in Christ's ministry. God loves His creation and He wants all people to know that in Christ they are forgiven, cleansed, reconciled, accepted, adopted as His beloved children, and invited to participate (share) in God's life. God offers this extravagant gift not because of anything we have done but because of who He is, and what He has done for us in and through Jesus and by the Holy Spirit.

God likes to hang out with us not because we are nice people but because we are His children. He loves us dearly just as the mother loves her baby even if the baby wears her out! That is how much God loves us. He doesn't want us to live as orphans without any hope or future. Why live a *hopeless* life when you can actually

by
**Dr. P.
Sellappan**

live in *His* abundant life here and now?

We at THE PLAIN TRUTH enjoy doing what we do and we hope you too enjoy working with us directly or indirectly. Participating in Christ's ministry is a privilege and He wants us to enjoy it. He doesn't want us to be like the worker who went to work in the vineyard early and later grumbled that he was not paid fairly as he got the same amount as the guy who came at the last hour.¹ His problem was that he didn't appreciate his master's kindness and he didn't enjoy his work. He was more focused on what he could *get* in the end instead of *participating* in his master's work. Let's not fall into the same trap—expecting *more* rewards for saving

more souls, paying more, or serving more (as *important* as they are). We are saved by grace, not by works.

We have grown in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ in the last 10 years and we trust you too have grown. Our understanding of God and His plan for humanity has matured. So we discard beliefs that are unbiblical and embrace new understanding as the Holy Spirit leads us.

God loves us dearly and unconditionally. After all, we are His beloved children. He is *for us* and He will *never* give up on us. Christ has eternally bound us to Himself. So we need not fear the present or the future, the circumstances we are in, or whatever happens to us. We are *secure* in Christ.

God's plan of salvation includes *everyone*, not just a select group of people. He gives us the opportunity to participate in Christ's ministry. He will save all who put their trust in His Son Jesus. But He will *not* force

His salvation on anyone as love must be given and received freely.

As we celebrate the 10th anniversary, we like to take this opportunity to thank you for your letters of encouragement, financial support, feedback and even occasional disagreements. We love you and we pray that God will bless you abundantly in every area of your life—health, finance, family, relationships and spiritual growth. We believe only the Gospel can change peoples' lives. So please pray for us that God will continue to supply our needs so that the Gospel can go to as many people as possible. □



¹ Matthew 20:1–16

THE Plain Truth

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8



16



20



10



5

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cover story

5 The meaning of the sacraments

Why we participate in baptism and communion.

articles

7 In remembrance of what?

In communion, we remember Jesus' death.

8 Are you and I good enough?

What does God require of us anyway?

10 Come, follow Me

Participate in Christ's ascended humanity.

12 You are recreated!

Jesus has given you your new humanity.

16 Lazarus and the rich man: a tale of unbelief

The story is not about heaven and hell.

22 The God revealed in Jesus Christ (Part 1)

Jesus is the full image of God.

regular features

2 Editorial

4 What our readers say

15 Another angle

19 Speaking of life...

20 Tammy's turn

21 Hmm...

Something to think about.

What our readers say:

May I know THE PLAIN TRUTH circulation and how it is funded?

Reader

Petaling Jaya

Ed.: Currently THE PLAIN TRUTH circulation stands at 20,000 per issue. It is distributed free of charge within Malaysia and Singapore. It costs approximately RM2.00 to print and mail a copy within Malaysia (RM5.00 for Singapore). The total cost comes to around RM40,000 per issue. The donations we receive from readers cover approximately 20% of the cost; the rest is borne by the sponsor (a small congregation of 30 members). So we are very grateful to those who support us financially and join us in spreading the Good News of Jesus to as many people as possible. (The members of THE PLAIN TRUTH team including writers are all volunteers; they don't receive any payments.)

The articles in THE PLAIN TRUTH inspire me to be tough and strong. I would like to thank all the contributors and writers alike.

Aaron A Ago

Kuching

Your teaching seems to somewhat differ from traditional Christianity. Which denomination do you belong to?

Jaya

Petaling Jaya

Ed.: We don't belong to any denomination. Why not? All believers are one in Christ. There is only one church, the church of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the head of the church and He leads the church through His Spirit. We are told to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus. So we change as the Spirit leads us to a deeper understanding of the Word of God. We don't want to be fossilised spiritually. Our goal is to participate in Christ's ministry. So we simply live and share the Gospel with as many people as possible and as plainly as possible.

THE PLAIN TRUTH has given me knowledge that I did not know before. The articles are thought-provoking and I share the knowledge with my friends by giving them the magazine after I have read them. The magazine helps me in my discussion with non-believers.

Chen Sam Yuen

Kuala Lumpur

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH helpful as it is God/people related. It helps to reach out to those who seek God and yet are reluctant to go to church. Keep up the good work. God bless you all.

Geh Cheng Lok

The articles are well written by people of faith. They are relevant to our daily living and help us to grow spiritually.

Gloriosa Rajendran

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH helpful in preparing Bible lessons. Thank you for your continuous support.

Jaganathan

THE PLAIN TRUTH provides spiritual food for me. Please renew my subscription. Please find enclosed RM 200/- as offering to support the printing and mailing of your magazine.

Kok Feng Tay

THE PLAIN TRUTH gives spiritual knowledge and understanding to a lay person like me. Herewith is a cheque for RM50.00, being my contribution towards your fine magazine.

Daniel Balan

Sungei Petani

Ed.: Thank you for your donations. Your participation in sharing the Gospel of Jesus is greatly appreciated.

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH helpful as the stories are interesting and thought-provoking. I am able to understand a bit more about Christianity each time I read the magazine. Thanks for retaining my name on your mailing list.

Lau Kai Thong

Ed.: We will send you THE PLAIN TRUTH as long as you want it and as long as God provides us the resources. We are encouraged to know that the articles are helping you in your spiritual understanding and growth.

I find THE PLAIN TRUTH helpful as it has shed much light on many topics. The Truth will set us free from the confusion in the world. Thank you and may the Lord's love fill us.

Lim Hee Lye

THE PLAIN TRUTH strengthens my faith, nourishes my belief and shows me the

way, the truth and the life.

Arthur Francis

Taipung

Thanks a lot for THE PLAIN TRUTH. It helps me in my spiritual growth, understanding and what is important. It encourages me to read the Bible more often.

Yeoh Boi Teong

Manjung, Perak

As a lay Christian, the articles help me to practise my faith better. I am happy to know that people of other faiths too find it interesting. Some pick it from the hairdressing saloon near my place.

Joshua SR

Petaling Jaya

Reading and sharing the articles gives me great strength and courage to carry on my daily life and care for others.

Emely Julius Makajil

Kota Kinabalu

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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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.

The meaning of the sacraments

Why has God given the church the sacraments of baptism and communion? Are they just some religious formalism that we have to go through or is there a real and meaningful purpose behind them? Too often we can allow the practice of baptism and the taking of communion to become a ritual we perform without any real understanding of their meaning or purpose. Some Christians even neglect these practices because they fail to see their significance or

by
**Colin
Lauchlan**

are raised up out of the water, the reality of our death to our old way of life and our resurrection to our new life in Christ is communicated and confirmed to us. We have been translated out of the darkness of this world into the light of the Kingdom of God. We are no longer a part of a human race (in Adam) that is cut off from God, but are now part of a new humanity, restored to the image of God, who will dwell with God and Christ for all eternity. Our lives have been united with Christ



importance.

God has given us these rituals and has commanded us to observe them. In performing them we participate in the reality of what God is accomplishing in our lives. In them we have the truth of the gospel proclaimed to us in a deeply personal way.

In baptism God confirms to us the once-and-for-all event that takes place when we repent of sinning against Him and commit our lives to serving Jesus Christ. As we are buried in the waters of baptism and

in His death and resurrection. His life is now our life. Because He has been resurrected to eternal life, we too have eternal life. Our baptism is the reminder that this transaction has taken place. It is an accomplished fact. This is why baptism is a once-off event. We do not need to be baptised again and again. Christ's sacrifice, offered once, has paid the full price and is sufficient to secure our salvation.

But after the initial euphoria of our baptism wears off, we find that there is a huge discrepancy between

the reality of who we are in Christ and the way we are living our lives. We find ourselves sinning and failing to live up to the high standards of our calling. We can begin to doubt the reality of our salvation and wonder whether God has rejected us because of our many failures. Or, we wonder whether we were really converted in the first place. But God knew that our faith would be weak and that in our fallen state we would sin, doubt our salvation at times, and tend to drift away from the commitment we made at baptism. He therefore made provision for us to be reminded both of our commitment to Christ, and of His commitment to us.

God provided the Communion service, also known as the Lord's Supper, as a way of reassuring us of His ongoing faithfulness to us in spite of our failures, and as a means for us to rededicate ourselves to the calling we have been given. This is why we take Communion repeatedly and regularly. It is an opportunity to be reminded of our continual and total dependence on God to accomplish our salvation. We express our trust in Him that He will complete the work He has begun in us. We are reminded as we put forward our empty hands to receive the bread and wine that we bring nothing to the table—we are looking to God to nourish and sustain us, and bring us safely into the reality of His Kingdom. The provision of the bread and wine is a reminder to us of God's faithfulness to complete the work which He has begun in us.

It is also an opportunity to rededicate ourselves to God. This is why we are asked to examine ourselves prior to taking the Lord's Supper. It reminds us that, as William Temple, a former Archbishop of Canterbury, once said: "All is of God; the only thing of my very own which I contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed." Communion is an opportunity for us to repent of our sins and turn to God for forgiveness and renewal.

We see the reality of the sacraments vividly illustrated in the lives of the apostles—the first Christians. These twelve disciples obeyed Jesus' call to leave all and follow Him. They committed their lives to Him. They were baptised¹ as an outward demonstration of the reality of their union with Him. They were now united to Him and together with Him formed the nucleus of the church, the new Israel of God.² When Peter asked Christ what the reward of the apostles would be, Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on His glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."³

This was the reality that the apostles looked forward

to: participation in the Kingdom of God, ruling and reigning with Christ. This glorious hope, however, was not sufficient to sustain them. They failed in their commitment to forsake all and follow Him. When Christ faced His hour of trial in the Garden of Gethsemane, instead of watching and praying with Him, they slept. When He was arrested, they fled. As He hung on the Cross, they stood afar off and looked on together with the rest of the crowd. Their hopes of a glorious future in the kingdom of God were dashed. They decided to return to their former occupations.

But their failure did not mean that Christ had abandoned them. He had known beforehand that they would forsake Him. He had even forewarned them: Then Jesus told them, "This very night you will

all fall away on account of Me, for it is written: 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"⁴ And yet, knowing they would forsake Him and that He would have to face the Cross alone, on that very same night, "While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you.'"⁵ He offered up His body and blood for them, reassuring them of His ongoing commitment to them in spite of their failures.

Peter had been the most vocal of the apostles, claiming that, "Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will." His failure was the most visible and apparent as he went on publicly to deny knowing Christ three times that same night. And yet, after His resurrection, Jesus went out of His way to reassure Peter of His continuing love for him, and to call him back to faithfulness to the commission he had been given.⁶

The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are a wonderful gift from God to

confirm and nourish our faith. Our union with Christ is communicated to us in baptism as a once-and-for-all completed reality; and in the Lord's Supper as a continuous ongoing reality. We have a reminder that we have been saved, and a reminder that we are still a work in progress. We can look forward in confidence to the time of our resurrection when we will see Christ as He is and be like Him.⁷ □

Reference:

William Temple, quoted by Sinclair Ferguson, *In Christ Alone*, Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007.



¹ John 3:22; 4:1

² Ephesians 2:20

³ Matthew 19:28

⁴ Matthew 26:31

⁵ Matthew 26:26–27

⁶ John 21:15–17

⁷ Philippians 3:20–21

In remembrance of what?

Funny, isn't it, how you can read a scripture many times and still miss something obvious? It happens even to experienced ministers and pastors.

I was preparing to speak to my local congregation at their monthly communion service, and began to read 1 Corinthians 11, starting in verse 23.

"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way, after supper He took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of Me.' For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

I have read those verses many times before. They are pretty much standard fare for a communion service. Different congregations and denominations have different traditions about the way they take communion, but we all agree on this basic understanding. So let's read on:

*"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."*¹

Whoa—wait a minute. That sounds serious. Paul is saying you should not take the Lord's Supper casually. Before taking the symbols of Jesus' body and blood you should "examine yourself" to make sure you are worthy. Right?

Wrong. Unless this verse is understood properly it can actually undermine the significance of the communion ceremony.

How exactly do you "examine yourself"? Who sets the questions? Who grades it? Who decides what is a passing or failing mark? And are you really in serious danger of damnation if you "fail" but decide to take communion anyway?

You see, when we put the emphasis on examining ourselves, we actually shift the focus *away* from the very thing Jesus asked us to do. An examination would inevitably concentrate on our sins and failings—on what *we* have done or not done. As a pastor, I would feel the need to remind my flock that they are sinners, and that it was because of their personal sins that Jesus came to die, etc.

The problem was, always, after such sermons, I



by
John Halford

"Before we take the bread and wine, it is certainly worth pausing for a moment to remind ourselves of the wonderful situation Jesus has made possible."

would have to reassure some impressionable people who were now convinced that they were "not worthy". Sometimes I would literally have to talk them into accepting the symbols of Christ's broken body and shed blood. They would do so hesitantly, with a, "Well, if you think it is okay. I'll really try harder in the future, I really will." I could imagine them timidly nibbling at the bread and sipping the wine with trepidation, deeply aware of their own unworthiness, knowing from experience that their promises to "do better" were hollow. I have known ministers hold the microphone so it would amplify the sound of breaking crisp unleavened bread. The congregation was encouraged to imagine the crack of the scourge and the pounding of the nails into Jesus' flesh. We wanted to drive home the point. But actually we were missing it.

Jesus did not say, "Do this in remembrance of what *you* have done." Or even, "Do this in remembrance of what *you* did to me." He asked us to do it in remembrance of what He did for us. In his epistle Paul mentions Jesus' request twice—"do this in remembrance of *Me*". Our very taking of the bread

and wine is our recalling of something about Jesus' love for His body, the church. It is a proclamation until He comes, not about our unworthiness, but about the Lord's death on our behalf, which makes us reconciled to God. That is the proclamation of the Lord's death.

What Jesus did was both pay the penalty for our sins

and become our righteousness so that we can enjoy a guilt free, positive and constructive relationship with God. He changed everything. He didn't just die, He was also resurrected. And when we come together to take the symbols of that sacrifice, we do it not in remembrance of our past, but of all that Jesus *is* for all who trust in Him.

Without that relationship you are indeed "damned". God does not have to do it—you put yourself in that position. I like the way Eugene Petersen renders these verses in *The Message Bible*.

"What you must solemnly realise is that every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master. You will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns. You must never let familiarity breed contempt."

"Anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Master irreverently is like part of the crowd that jeered and spit on Him at His death. Is that the kind

continued on page 20

Are you and I

When you first understood that God offers you eternal life, how did you react? If you were like me, you thought to yourself, “Why would God care about me? I am not a good person!” Perhaps you asked yourself some disturbing questions such as “How good do I have to be before God will give me eternal life?” Then you may have attempted to please God by trying to live a life free of sin, but without success.

It seems that we Christians sin about as much as non-Christians, in spite of our sincere efforts to clean up our act. Then when we see our flaws and failures, we may become frustrated or discouraged, and think that we are not worthy of receiving everlasting life.

If you have thoughts about being “good enough”, you are not alone. These concerns often arise from our mistaken views of God. Let’s take a look at some very common, but mistaken thinking of what God requires of us.

The Pharisees’ mistaken view of God

Shortly after Jesus invited Matthew (also known as Levi) to be His disciple, Matthew honoured Jesus by putting on a large banquet. He invited many guests, including tax collectors and some other local people with bad reputations. The Pharisees, the dominant religious leaders of that time, were keeping a close watch on Jesus because they were critical of Him and His teachings. They noted that He was associating with people they dutifully avoided. They asked “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?” Jesus responded, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”¹ In making this statement He was excluding the Pharisees, not because they were truly righteous, but because they considered themselves to be righteous based on their meticulous observance of many man-made rules such as ritualistic hand washing before eating.

Jesus pointed out that the Pharisees had a problem they couldn’t recognise—they trusted in their own brand of righteousness, not realising that they fell miserably short of true righteousness. They were overlooking more important matters such as justice, mercy, and faithfulness.²

Here is a lesson for us. God does not require us to adhere to a set of detailed “do and don’t” rules and rituals like the Pharisees. Instead, He desires that we live a life guided by moral virtues.

There was a time when I too, like many Christians, had some Pharisee in me. I believed that as a Christian I should follow a set of do’s and don’ts, including some dietary restrictions and to avoid close associations with bad people.

In this example we see that Jesus loved everyone, even big-time sinners. However, He did not approve of the kind of religion that required obedience to a lot of detailed physical rituals.



by
Paul Hailey

Martin Luther’s mistaken view of God

Luther was a famous German theologian who lived from 1483 to 1546. Early in his Christian life he was tormented by the conviction that to receive eternal life he had to attain a high level of personal righteousness through his own efforts. He struggled to find peace of mind by diligent devotion to long prayers, frequent fasting, detailed confession of sin, pilgrimages, and even self-flagellation. He exhausted himself with helping other people and praying for them. The more he tried to please God, the more he felt frustrated by his inability to overcome the sin he recognised within himself.

But as Luther continued to examine the scriptures, with great joy and relief he finally learned that God’s gift of eternal life was indeed a *gift*—not something earned through human effort. He understood that all who have faith in Christ as their Saviour are divinely declared righteous and sinless. He learned that God does not set a minimum requirement of personal righteousness.

Jesus makes us ‘good enough’

Clearly, God does not desire us to live like the Pharisees, dutifully following a list of man-made rules of dos and don’ts. Also, as Martin Luther learned, God does desire that we live a righteous life, but our acts of righteousness do not earn us eternal life. Instead, salvation comes entirely through the work and person of Jesus.

When Jesus had a discussion with a Pharisee named Nicodemus, He said that whoever believes in Him would not perish but would have eternal life.³ What a simple explanation! We may question this seemingly inadequate response to this all-important matter. Did Jesus forget something? How can we be good enough to be given everlasting life simply because we believe something? Here’s how: Belief in Him implies acknowledging Him as the Lord and Saviour of humanity. In coming to earth as a man, He represented humanity before God’s throne. As our divine Representative, *all* of God’s expectations of us were fully met and realised in His baptism, life, death and resurrection.

When Jesus was baptised He was not only setting an example we should follow, but as our Representative His baptism washed away all our sins—past, present and future. In living a perfect life, He represented us, making us sinless in God’s view. When He was crucified, our sinful nature was put to death (but not yet perfected).⁴ When He was resurrected and ascended to Heaven, He became the “firstborn of many” making possible our future resurrection and birth into the heavenly realm.⁵

There are two other common but mistaken ideas of God that should be mentioned. Firstly, it is often believed that God will some day enact “divine justice”

good enough?



for all the wrongs we have committed. Similarly, there also is a common belief that God will weigh our good deeds against our bad deeds to determine our worthiness for everlasting life. You probably have seen this belief portrayed by a set of 'divine balances'. But, let's note that scripture tells us that *God is love*—that is, all of His thoughts and actions are motivated by *love*.⁶ Scripture also tells us that love *keeps no record of wrongs*.⁷ Certainly our God of love lives up to His own standard of love!

Be assured that our loving Father does not keep a record of our wrongs. Instead, He takes note only of our good deeds!

Let's not forget however, that we are still prone to making mistakes, and when we do, we *should* feel some guilt and express our remorse to God. He may allow us to suffer consequences for our mistakes, and it may be appropriate for us to apologise or make amends to people we have offended. But above all, we can rejoice in the fact that God cleanses us from *all* unrighteousness.

Remember, Jesus didn't shy away from sinners. No matter how bad we have been or how bad we may be, we are good enough to come to Him. Let's not let guilt make us feel disconnected from Him. We can, as the writer of Hebrews wrote, approach God with full assurance of faith and feeling clean from a bad conscience.⁸

God desires that we have a loving and comfortable relationship with Him, and that is more important to Him than seeing us suffering lingering guilt, feeling cut off from Him, reliving and agonising over past mistakes, or worrying that some day He will punish us for our sins.

So what must we do to be given eternal life? Our role begins with believing in Jesus for who He is—our sinless and perfect Representative before the throne of God, our personal Saviour and Lord. When we do this, we can't help but respond with humility, gratitude, and the desire to build a relationship with Him through prayer, Bible study, and association with other Christians.

When we do this, those acts of righteousness we formerly thought were necessary to please God will come by the Holy Spirit inspiring us and working in our lives.

The Apostle Paul wrote some words that give us absolute assurance that Jesus has already made us 'good enough'. "For it is by grace (undeserved pardon) that *you have been saved, through faith*—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."⁹ □

¹ Luke 5:29–31

² Matthew 23:23

³ John 3:16

⁴ Colossians 3:3

⁵ Romans 8:29

⁶ 1 John 4:8

⁷ 1 Corinthians
13:5

⁸ Hebrews 10:22

⁹ Ephesians
2:8–10

Come, f

Just as Jesus extended this invitation to Matthew, Peter, James and John and others long ago, today He invites us.¹

The Bible on Jesus

The Bible reveals to us who He is—what He likes and dislikes, what He has done, His thoughts, plans and hopes. It's like a Facebook account; only that postings on the wall were done over hundreds of years, by those who knew Him. These contributors include, among others, princes and kings, a military commander, farmer, sheep-breeder, scholar, doctor, tax collector, commercial fishermen, and His own brother! And their contributions come in the form of stories, poetry, letters, historical records, imageries, laws and

by
**Mak
Chew Yeng**

died from a heart attack, and within weeks, her own body system showed signs of a debilitating incurable disease. Friends and family had prayed for her healing but her disability remained; yet, she was not angry, bitter or resentful toward God. She did not insist on understanding why God allowed such circumstances to touch her. She didn't fight for control of the timing of her healing. Instead, she frequently pointed out to us God's benevolent interventions in encouraging and enabling her in her struggle to cope. She was firmly convinced of the goodness and greatness of God. To her, God did not need to do this or do that to demonstrate His goodness. Such was her relationship with her God. She didn't use God for her own purposes. She allowed God to be God in her life.



songs, prayers and proverbs. Personalities and living conditions influenced the writing styles and emphasis in their writing. Also, details of what they knew of Him in their encounters and what He did may overlap or differ in perspective, but they all agree on this: He is good and He is great. He just is!²

Relating to Him

It is our accepting Him into our everyday living, trusting and believing Him for who He says He is, that sets the nature of our relationship with Him; or it should.

A friend of mine named Phua Chwee Wan demonstrated this kind of relationship with God with her life. Without any apparent warning, her husband

It is precisely this decision to surrender our will to God's will that marks our willingness to follow Him. It's as if we receive some advice and instructions from our doctor, plumber or mechanic. When we trust him, we will follow what he says.

Following versus obeying

Let's note that following Jesus and obeying Jesus is not the same. Following Jesus is an attitude, an internal orientation of the heart, an intention. Obedience to Jesus, an action, is the result. If we focus on obedience to Jesus, we will be concerned with behaviour, the outward performance—ours and others. A performance-based way of life is marked

ollow Me

by anxiety, fear, guilt and a constant pressure to “do more, do better”. We cannot be sure whether we are good enough, or whether we have done enough. This focussing on the “we” is the problem. Jesus invites us to focus on Him (actually, this is what repentance is), to follow Him; He is our example.³ The Greek word translated “example” here means a teacher’s copybook on which children trace their letters when learning to write. We are urged to follow His steps, to be His disciples.

What “following” looks like

A disciple is a student, a trainee, a practitioner, an apprentice, a follower. Some Chinese martial arts movies (popularised by Jackie Chan, and the Wong Fei Hoong series) can help show what this “following” looks like! A Church friend by the name of Ng Sew Chong shares here his insight on the striking similarity between following Jesus and the Chinese principles of discipleship.

In Chinese, “*sifu*” (or master) has two root words, literally meaning that he is both “teacher” and “father” to the student. *Sifu* is most notably associated with martial arts, but it applies to the healing and performing arts, and vocational skills as well. The *sifu* is the ultimate authority in his particular school of discipline. He alone selects his students, who can be orphans/refugees picked up from the streets or those whom their fathers handed over to be “controlled/managed” and “taught”, for a fee. From then on, strong as filial piety is in Chinese culture, the student’s loyalty and obedience to the *sifu* takes precedence—even to the point of death. The *sifu*’s students live with him, and treat each other as brothers and sisters, thus transforming the school community into a clan. The *sifu*, as head, will provide for and protect the clan.

The student is to be in only one school of discipline, and no other. He is to observe, learn, practise and imitate the distinctive movements behind the thoughts and principles, morals and style of the *sifu*, his master. His aspiration is to be a mirror image of his master,⁴ correctly reflecting his master in his life. To achieve this, he totally subjects himself to the master’s will.

His training usually starts with learning characteristics like humility, patience, submission, diligence and self-control. This takes place when he is directed to chop firewood, scrub floors, draw water from the well, run errands, and other seemingly petty, irrelevant tasks! Without his knowing, it is these small, insignificant repetitions that can initiate the vital change from within, to become more like the master. Only when the student has suitably been “broken in” would the master pass on his distinctive movements. The student’s training will become more strenuous from then on. It almost certainly includes occasional harsh discipline, which he accepts (and even welcomes) because he knows that this is for his good. He trusts and believes

the master knows best.

(This strict code of discipleship was in practice till the late 1800s, after which it became less demanding.)

Following Jesus today

Jesus’ disciples (and those Chinese students) physically left their families to learn from the Master. Obviously, the mechanics are not the same today; but the intentions and priorities—the heart or attitudes—of the disciples remain unchanged. We learn from the Master in an attitude of observation, study, obedience and imitation. We subject our desires and our will to Him. This is the price we pay—not in the form of fees, but in a consciously chosen course of action. The Bible calls it denying our self, crucifying our carnal nature and carrying our cross. For instance, when we choose integrity over monetary gain or over admiration from those around, it almost always requires extra effort and a longer time to achieve our goals. Also, be prepared even to be labelled a fool!

As we continue to pursue God’s values and priorities, we now, in faith, depend on God for the grace and the power to live as He lives⁵—in our thinking, feeling and behaving. Then we will be filled with peace, joy and love as we increasingly learn how to extend grace to others—by learning how to live at peace with those around us, pray for those who use us, not take what is not ours, not stretch the truth, leave home on Sunday morning to come to Church to fellowship and listen to a sermon, and so forth. These are small, concrete steps within our freedom to take in following Jesus. (Let’s be clear here: These “small”, but defining, choices don’t transform us. God transforms us, through these “small” choices.) God then lives His life through us, by His Spirit—effectively making His quality of life real in us. We then become channels of His grace, given opportunity to participate in what He does. That is why the emphasis is always on the attitudes, the heart, the inner self—of its trust and dependence on God, the Master. Transformation of this inner self (not the outward behaviour) into the mirror image of the Master is the goal. As this change progresses, who the Master is (His character), will then be revealed through what we do (the obedience part). That is why the life of Jesus’ disciples is so specifically incarnational.⁶

The New Testament is a particularly rich resource for discipleship. It is of the disciples, by the disciples and for the disciples. The books of the gospels, Ephesians and 1 Peter give us an inviting vision of the heavenly kind of life that God intends for us. Through God within us enabling our desire and intent to follow Jesus, we are changed and transformed inwardly. This then is the secret to enter into and experience life under the Trinitarian Presence—and participating in what God is doing! Living the heavenly kind of life is possible today!

Let’s keep this in mind every time we’re reminded of His invitation to “Come, follow Me!” □

¹ Matthew 4:19

² Exodus 3:14

³ 1 Peter 2:21

⁴ Matthew 10:25

⁵ Galatians 2:20

⁶ Romans 7:18–25

You are r

Let's start this article with some statements made by Jesus Christ, St. Peter and St. Paul.

A leading Pharisee by the name of Nicodemus came secretly in the night to meet Jesus. He confessed that Jesus was from God because of the miracles He performed. Jesus told Nicodemus, "...unless one is *born again*, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus was baffled. He asked, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Jesus reiterated, "...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, '*You must be born again*.'"¹

St. Peter, after healing a lame beggar, preached Jesus to a group of Jews who had killed Jesus. Peter's message convicted and pricked their hearts. So they asked, "What must we do?" Peter responded, "Repent... and be *converted*, that your sins may be blotted out, so that *times of refreshing* may come from the presence of the Lord."²

St. Paul exhorted believers at Rome, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the *renewing of your mind*. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will."³ On another occasion, he told believers at Corinth, "...if anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*; old things have passed away; behold, *all things have become new*. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ...that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them."⁴

Jesus, Peter and Paul used different words—born again, times of refreshing, conversion, renewing of the mind and new creation—to mean the same thing—*recreation*.

So how are human beings recreated? This article explains how. But first let's clear two misconceptions.

Misconceptions

Some view recreation as reincarnation. *Reincarnation* is the belief that when people die they become another person, creature or something else in an endless cycle of rebirths, the quality of their next life being dependent on their performance in this life. They believe they can become progressively better with each new birth and ultimately attain the ideal state—perfection, holiness, nirvana—that God requires of them. They believe if they work hard and long enough they can attain perfection.

Some Christians view recreation as overcoming their sins sufficiently so that God would accept them as righteous. So they strive hard to overcome their sins. They don't want to be caught like the man who came to the wedding banquet without proper wedding attire.⁵

The truth is we can *never* overcome our sinful



by
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recreated!



nature—our thoughts, our attitudes, our actions. We may be able to overcome some of our sinful habits some of the time but not all of our sinful habits all of the time. No matter how long or how many cycles of rebirths we enter, we will still emerge as *sinners*. That is the reality.

Sin's effect

Sin has corrupted the entire human race such that we no longer bear God's image. We are utterly incapable of making ourselves right even in a million years. Sin has corrupted our marriage and family relationships, our business and economics, and our politics and religions. It has distorted our thinking, our attitude and our actions.

St. Paul, quoting Prophet Isaiah, describes the appalling human condition thus, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one. Their throats are open graves; their tongues practise deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes."⁶

Today, the condition is a lot worse. Humanity is in a desperate situation unless God Himself intervenes and rescues us. Prophet Isaiah expressed our dilemma in this way: "Then the Lord saw *it*, and it displeased Him that *there was* no justice. He saw that *there was* no man, and wondered that *there was* no intercessor" and then went on to offer a solution: "Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him. For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak."⁷

The truth is we are utterly incapable of making ourselves holy and righteous. That's why God sent Jesus to save us and that's why we need Jesus. Only Jesus can make us holy, righteous and acceptable, but how?

Human recreation

Recreation means *new* creation. It has nothing to do with your old self. It is a *new you*. It means to be *reborn*. It means to be sinless. It means to love God with all your heart, mind and soul. It means to love your neighbour as yourself. It means to be pure in heart, mind and thought. It means to be faithful, obedient and selfless. It means to be perfect and holy. It means to be like Jesus.

That is a very tall order—an unattainable goal—given our sinful nature. So how can we be recreated? The

only way is for the Son of God to *assume* our humanity and live His life *vicariously* in *our place* and on *our behalf*. That means He must become human and live a perfect and blameless life for us and *give that life* to us. That is how we can be recreated and that is precisely what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

Incarnation

Jesus came in the flesh⁸ as our human *representative* and *substitute*. His entire life—birth, death, resurrection and ascension—is a vicarious act. He lived His life for us and on our behalf. Jesus came as the second Adam and offered to God perfect obedience, faith and worship in place of the first Adam (representing all humanity) who failed. He did this vicariously for us. That is how we are recreated.

Incarnation, or God coming in the flesh, is not the same thing as reincarnation. In *incarnation*, the Son of God assumes our humanity (without ceasing to be God) in the person of Jesus. Jesus is *fully* God and *fully* human, both divine and human, *within His incarnate self*. He lived just like us except that He *never* sinned. After His death and resurrection, He ascended to heaven and is now at the right hand of God as a *perfect human being*. He has a *glorified* body which is not subject to the limitations that we have. He lives this life *forever for us*.

Incarnation is a *one-time* event (unlike reincarnation). It applies to *only one person*—Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person in the Godhead, the Creator of the universe.

God's two movements

God in the person of Jesus came down from heaven to earth, lived and died, and ascended to heaven. Both the downward movement from heaven to earth and the upward movement from earth to heaven is God's one saving work accomplished in Christ. Theologian Elmer Colyer describes these movements nicely in his book, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology*, Chapter 3.

God's self-giving to us

The downward movement is Christ's *self-giving to humanity*. He did this as a *human* being, not as a divine Son. He descended into hell by taking on our sinful nature and then ascended to heaven after *perfecting*⁹ (recreating) it to God's holy nature. He descended in the *flesh* but ascended in *glorified* form. Jesus came down from heaven to participate in the depths of our hopeless plight so that He might abolish it in *Himself*. In His incarnation, Jesus has *bound Himself to us* and *us to Himself*. By incorporating Himself into our humanity, He has given us His very being, becoming bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. He identified with us to the uttermost, penetrating into our disobedient and corrupt condition, in order to pour out God's love

upon us, taking away our sin and guilt. It is His self-giving and saving work.

God's self-offering for us

The upward movement is Christ's *self-offering to God*. He offered perfect obedience, faithfulness and worship to God as a human being *for us and on our behalf* because we couldn't do it. He consecrated Himself for us in order that we might be consecrated through Him. He offered to God perfect obedience and atoning sacrifice *in our place*.

Participation in Jesus' life

The key to this twofold movement is *participation*. With incarnation, heaven participates in earth so that earth might participate in heaven. God participates in human flesh so that human flesh might participate in God. Holiness participates in corruption so that corruption might become uncorrupted by participating in holiness.

Christ has bound Himself to us in His incarnational self-giving unto death in order that He might bring us into living union and communion with Himself in His

eternal self-offering to God. His self-offering is vicarious—made in our place and on our behalf. It is accomplished *once* and for all and need not be repeated. It is *eternally valid* and *eternally effective* for us, for the Gift is identical with the Giver and Giver is identical with the Gift, and the Offering and the Offerer, are one.

In Communion/Eucharist, we participate through the Spirit in Christ's self-giving and self-offering for us. Through the Spirit we are intimately united with

Christ, by communion with His body and blood. Our sacrifice becomes His, even as His has already become ours, by virtue of His vicarious humanity. His perpetual self-giving *to us* as well as His eternal self-offering *for us* are given so that we might be brought to eternal communion with the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. This is one saving divine action of salvation which is considered as historically perfected, perpetually present, and eternally valid by the Father through the Son and in the Spirit.

Implications of God's acts in Christ

Jesus' coming as the *vicarious man* has two implications and both have to do with the idea of *connection*. One is the connection *between the gospel and the person of Jesus*. It is about *what became of Him*. The second is the connection *between Jesus and us*. It is about *what become of us in Him*. Theologian Baxter Kruger has described Jesus' vicarious humanity aptly in his book, *God is for Us*, Chapter 4.



continued on page 18

Parents, are you with your children?

Having come down with a bad cold I took a day off from work and decided to rest by sleeping longer than usual and going for a relaxed breakfast. My daughter was in school and my wife was at work when I opened the newspaper while sipping a glass of hot tea at the restaurant. Instantly the headlines caught my attention and I was shocked to read of a teenage girl who took her own life by jumping off the second floor of her school building.

To the horror of her classmates the teenager suddenly walked out of her class during lesson and sat precariously on the corridor ledge of the second floor. She then fell over the ledge backwards and sustained serious head injuries that took her life. The troubled teenager had posted several comments online via Facebook days earlier about things that were troubling her. Instead of receiving sympathy and help, her online associates had taunted her when she expressed the desire to commit suicide. What was most disturbing was the fact that some of her online 'friends' told her to go ahead and kill herself. The teachers of the school described her as a very well-behaved and intelligent student. The parents were distraught and could not believe that she would take her own life. How then could such a good teenager make such a drastic decision? Tragically there are so many disturbed teenagers today who really need help and are not getting it.

I remember when I was teaching in class one day there was a student who was particularly annoying and creating constant trouble. The normal reaction is to sternly warn him and get him to behave. But that wasn't working, so I asked him to follow me after class and took him to a quiet spot where I asked him what was troubling him. He looked at me for a moment and said, "My parents are divorcing today. They are in court now." I listened as he revealed what was disturbing him. I told him that I could not solve his parents' divorce dilemma but he could come and talk to me whenever he wanted. The boy went away silently but relieved after having unloaded a heavy burden. Parents, are you taking your children for granted?

Today most teenagers don't get to spend quality time with their parents. Dad and Mom are constantly working while children are filling the vacuum with



by
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school, tuition classes and now most prominently with online relationships. When strangers begin to take the place of parents in giving advice and steer them in decision making, something is terribly wrong with society. I work with teenage students almost everyday and I know for a fact that when we talk to them and listen to them they respond very positively.

It is vital that parents develop a good relationship with their children. We don't talk to our children just when we need to instruct them, advise them or reprimand them. That kind of stern talk is least necessary when your teenage son or daughter enjoys

being with you. Have you parents ever asked yourselves if your children enjoy being in your company? Would they rather be some place else? If so, then why? I've seen parents provide everything for their children. Money, the latest gadgets, expensive clothing and even a car are willingly given but not their time or presence. I have noticed many times that my daughter though she is thrilled by online games on the computer or various innovations on my mobile phone or even the best birthday presents, is still happiest when my wife and I spend time with her. All the presents and gifts in the world mean nothing without supportive parents. However, I agree that our best efforts do not always allow us to spend the needed time with our children. Our work schedule and urgent matters keep interfering. Is there a way to ensure that our children are not left seeking solace from strangers? Yes, there is a way that many do not consider.

Teach your children to pray. Teach them that there is a real God who watches over them and is there for them at every moment even in their darkest and most

troubled times. Tell them that the Son of God and Saviour Jesus Christ is not just for adults to talk to. He is just as interested in listening and coming to the help of teenagers and children. He promises to give rest and comfort to anyone who seeks him.¹ How many of our children really know that? The Bible states that parents have the responsibility to teach their children diligently at every opportune moment about God.² If we don't, others will take the opportunity to cloud their minds with destructive thoughts. We the parents are the ones who must lead our children, not strangers. □

¹ Matthew 11: 28–30

² Deuteronomy 6: 5–7

Lazarus and the rich man

Have you ever heard that God is incapable of reaching those who do not become believers before they die? It's a cruel and destructive doctrine, and its so-called "proof" is a single verse in the parable known as Lazarus and the Rich Man. But like all of Scripture, the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man falls within a particular context and needs to be understood in that context.

It is always bad business to base a doctrine on one verse alone, and especially on a verse in a story designed to make a different point altogether. Jesus told the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man for two reasons:



by
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welcomed sinners and ate with them.¹ First, Jesus told three parables: The Shepherd Who Rejoices Over Finding His Lost Sheep, The Woman Who Rejoices Over Finding Her Lost Coin, and The Father Who Rejoices Over Finding His Lost Son.

In telling these three parables, Jesus wanted the tax collectors and sinners, as well as the grumbling Pharisees and scribes who believed they had no need of repentance, to know that "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." But there's more.



- (1) to expose and condemn the refusal of the leaders of Israel to believe in Him, and
- (2) to reverse common assumptions about riches being a sign of God's favour and poverty being proof of God's disfavour.

Lazarus and the Rich Man is the final parable of five that Jesus told in response to a group of Pharisees and scribes who, being lovers of money and self-importance, were disgruntled over the fact that Jesus

Money vs. God

Jesus moves to the fourth story, the dishonest manager. Its point: If you love money, as the Pharisees did, you will not love God. Jesus then pointedly told the Pharisees, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of others, but God knows your hearts. What people value highly is detestable in God's sight."

The Law and the Prophets stand as witnesses, Jesus told them, that the kingdom of God has arrived and

an: a tale of unbelief

that everyone is urgently piling into it. His implied message: “Because you prize the things of men, not the things of God, you are rejecting God’s urgent summons to enter His kingdom, which can be done only through Me.”

Then in verse 18, Jesus implied that the Jewish religious leaders have “divorced” themselves from the Law and the Prophets, which witness to Him, and in so doing have rejected God (compare Jeremiah 3:6).

Then, beginning in verse 19, in the context of the previous four parables, Jesus told the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man.

A tale of unbelief

There are three characters in the story. First is the rich man (representing the Pharisees who love money), then the miserable beggar Lazarus (representing a class of people despised by the Pharisees), and finally, Abraham (whose bosom or lap was a Jewish symbol of comfort and peace in the afterlife).

In the story, the beggar Lazarus dies. But Jesus surprises the listeners by saying that “the angels carried him to Abraham’s side”. That was exactly the opposite of what the Pharisees expected would happen to a man like Lazarus. They believed that people like Lazarus were poor and diseased beggars because they were under God’s curse, and therefore they believed that such people go to be tormented in Hades when they die.

“Not so,” Jesus is telling them. “Your worldview is upside down. You know nothing of my Father’s kingdom. Not only are you wrong about how my Father feels about the beggar, but you are wrong about how my Father feels about you.”

Jesus completes the surprise by telling them that the rich man also died and was buried, but he, not the beggar, is the one who found himself being tormented in Hades. The rich man looked up and saw Abraham far off with none other than Lazarus by his side. He cried out, “Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.”

But Abraham had news for the rich man. He tells him in essence, “All your life you loved riches and had no time for the likes of Lazarus. But I do have time for the likes of Lazarus, and now he is with me, and you have nothing.” And then comes the verse that is so often torn out of context: “Besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.”

Here and there

Have you ever wondered why anybody could possibly want to pass from “here to you”? It is obvious why someone might want to cross from “there to us”, but from “here to you” makes no sense. Or does

it? Abraham began his words to the rich man by addressing him as “son”, then points out to him that not even those who might *want* to get to him are able to—because of the great chasm.

But the underlying revelation in this story is that, in fact, there *is* one who crosses chasms for the sake of sinners.

The Bridge across the chasm

God gave His Son for all sinners, not just for sinners like Lazarus, but for sinners like the rich man, too.² But the rich man, a symbol of the Pharisees and the scribes who gathered to condemn Jesus, didn’t want the Son of God. The rich man wanted what he always wanted—his own comfort at the expense of others.

Jesus’ condemnation of the unbelief of the Pharisees in this story concludes with the rich man arguing that if someone would warn his brothers, they would not come into the place where he was. But Abraham points out, “They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.” Jesus had already told them that the Law and Prophets are a testimony to Him, a testimony they had rejected (compare John 5:45–47 and Luke 24:44–47).

“No, father Abraham,” the rich man responded, “but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.” Abraham responds, “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

And they weren’t convinced; the Pharisees, scribes and chief priests who conspired to have Jesus crucified also conspired to have soldiers lie about His resurrection,³ and proceeded to persecute and kill those who became believers.

Missing the point

Jesus did not tell this parable to paint us a portrait of heaven and hell. It is a parable of judgment against the unbelieving religious leadership of the time, and unkind, selfish rich people of all times. Jesus uses the common Jewish imagery of the afterlife (that of Hades for the wicked and “being with Abraham” for the righteous) as a literary backdrop to make the point. In this parable Jesus was not commenting on the validity or accuracy of Jewish imagery of the afterlife; He was simply using that imagery as scenery for His story.

Jesus’ focus was not to satisfy our itching curiosities about what heaven and hell are like. His priority is to let us in on God’s secrets,⁴ the mystery of the ages⁵—that in Him, Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, God has always been reconciling the world to Himself.⁶

Our preoccupation with the details of the afterlife can only lead us away from the very point missed by the rich man in the story: Believe in the One who came back from the dead. ■

¹ Luke 15:1–32;
16:14–31

² John 3:16–17

³ Matthew 27:62–
66

⁴ Romans 16:25;
Ephesians 1:9

⁵ Ephesians 3:4–5

⁶ 2 Corinthians
5:19

continued from page 14

The Jesus-Gospel Connection

Many Christians focus on *what Jesus did for them* than on *Jesus Himself*. They focus on His *death* [the act] than on *Jesus* [the person]. In doing so, they have lost the connection between the work of Jesus and the person of Jesus.

The work of God in Christ is not merely *through* Christ but *in* Christ. What God does in Jesus, He does *in* and *as* Jesus. It is an incarnational work. The good news is about *what has become of the Son of God—it is about the change in His existence*.

Jesus entered into our existence. *He* became what *we are*. *He* became flesh, *He* suffered, *He* died, *He* rose again and *He* ascended to heaven. He is now with the Father *as a human being*. It is the good news of *Jesus* and His existence *as a human being* with the Father, *who He is* and *what He has become*.

Jesus took His humanity through death into resurrection and into the embrace of the Father. He died *as man*, rose *as man* and He ascended to the Father *as man*. As man, He hammered out a human existence with His Father in the Spirit. He forged a *new* human existence. *He is the new human existence*.

The Jesus-Us Connection

Jesus Christ has become the *substitutionary* man, the *vicarious* man. The gospel is not merely the news of what God has done *through* Jesus, but of what God has done *in* and *as* Jesus. It is the good news of His human existence which He has forged in utter at-oneness with the Father in the Spirit.

What has *become of Jesus* is good news *to us*. *We are implicated in Him and what became of Him*. How? As He is the Creator, *you and I and the world are bound up in Him*.¹⁰ While He is a *particular individual*, He also represents all humanity. *This was the act of God dealing with all humanity*. St. Paul put it aptly: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.”¹¹ He reconciled *us* in Christ.

In the Jesus-Gospel connection, Jesus ascended to the Father as a perfect human being. But how does that help us? We are still imperfect. This is where the Jesus-Us connection comes in. Because Jesus is the Creator, the whole universe (atoms, molecules, gravity and us) is bound up in Him. That means what happens to Him, happens to us. So when Jesus died, we died. When He rose, we rose.¹² Jesus is in heaven and we too are in heaven (but now hidden in Christ¹³). We are decisively implicated in what became of Him.

Just us all Israel was implicated in the act of the high priest when he went into the holy of holies, so all humanity is implicated in the one saving act of the eternal High Priest Jesus when He entered into the true Holy of Holies!

The incarnation is an act of profound identification and connection with us. We don't live independent lives; we are intimately bound up in Christ. He is our Mediator and High Priest, our representative and substitute. We live *in* Him. All human beings have been gathered up in Jesus' humanity.¹⁴ *He is our new humanity*.

The Promise

Long ago, God promised to send a Deliverer to save humanity from sin and death.¹⁵ At the appointed time, the Son of God came as human being and through fire and trial, through crucifixion and resurrection, forged a human existence in utter at-oneness with His Father. Now, as a human being, Jesus dwells in the very glory and life of God. Now, as a human being, He lives face to face with His Father, secure and fully sharing in all that the Father *is* and *has* in the Spirit.

Jesus is *with* the Father now not only as a man, but as *the* man, the *vicarious* man. His very existence as

man with the Father, His very humanity at-one with God, constitutes *our* justification, reconciliation, sanctification, adoption and glorification. In Christ *we* have been taken into the very life and glory of God. In Jesus, God laid hold of the world and *recreated* it in union with Himself. *He is our union with God*.

Live in the reality

Secretly, without your knowledge and without your permission, *God has recreated you!* God knows you need a complete spiritual makeover. He hates to see you living a fearful, unhappy, aimless, selfish, hypocritical and false life. Through His birth, life,

death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus has cleansed and reconciled you to God. He has crucified your old self and has given you His own perfect humanity as a free gift so that you can participate in God's life and bask in His glory. You *are* God's child, loved, accepted, adopted and embraced by God. You are a *new* creation—reborn, regenerated, renewed—bearing the image of God. Aren't you glad?

This is the *reality* of your life. But you may say, “I don't see it in my life.” You don't *see* it yet because it is now hidden from you.¹⁶ But you will see it when Jesus is revealed at His second coming. That takes faith.

Out of the abundance of God's love, He has recreated us in His own image. So how do we respond to such an extravagant gift? Well, we can thank God and start living our new life in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and experience God's love, joy, peace, freedom and security. Why wait? □

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“Long ago, God
promised to send
a Deliverer to save
humanity from sin
and death.”

¹ John 1:3–8

² Acts 3:19

³ Romans 12:2

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:17–19

⁵ Mathew 22:12

⁶ Isaiah 59:1–15,
Romans 3:10–18

⁷ Isaiah 59:15–17

⁸ John 1:14

⁹ Hebrews 5:9

¹⁰ Colossians 1:16–17

¹¹ 2 Corinthians 5:18–19

¹² 2 Corinthians 5:14

¹³ Colossians 3:3

¹⁴ Ephesians 1:10

¹⁵ Romans 9:25–26; 11:26

¹⁶ Colossians 1:26; 3:3

The crown of thorns

When Jesus was on trial for His life, the soldiers twisted thorns into a makeshift crown and jammed it on His head.¹ They hung a purple robe on Him and ridiculed Him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews,” while they punched and kicked Him.

Jesus was the king, and yet His rule was preceded by rejection, ridicule and suffering. His painful crown of thorns was one more demonstration of His right to rule a world filled with pain and suffering. At the same time, it was a symbol of hope for us, reminding us that we are joined to Jesus in the crucible of suffering.

The crown of thorns is not just part of a movie scene in which we are overwhelmed with the suffering that Jesus went through to be our Saviour. Jesus said that if we want to follow Him, we must take up our cross each day. He could just as easily have said that we must put on our crown of thorns. We are joined to Jesus in the crucible of suffering.

In Romans 8:17–18, the apostle Paul wrote:

“Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”

Jesus accepted the crown of thorns as part of His bitter cup of enduring what human beings endure, as part of opening the door for us to escape with Him from this world of tears. In this world, oppressors jam thorns on their victims. And in this world, Jesus suffered whatever they wanted to do with Him to redeem us all from this world of ungodliness and thorns.

As a result, He says to every man, woman and child, “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



by
**Dr. Joseph
Tkach**

you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”²

We all experience our crowns of thorns. We all have our crosses to bear. We all live in this fallen world and take part in its pain and sorrow. But the crown of thorns and the cross of death have met their match in Jesus. In Him we have life, life that at present cannot be seen, but is nonetheless real.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 2:7:

“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages He might show the incomparable riches of His grace, expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

We live in hope, knowing that this life is not all there is—that the day is coming when our faith will be sight, when all the promises will reach their ultimate fulfilment, when every tragedy of this life will be turned into the joy of the world to come. John wrote Revelation 21:3–5:

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then He said, ‘Write this down, for

these words are trustworthy and true.’”

Whatever crises we face in this life, we can take comfort and courage in two things. Our suffering is a participation in Jesus’ suffering. And Jesus has for us a new life—beyond this one—in which there will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain. □

¹ John 19:2

² Matthew 11:28–30



Remember Him with joy

by
Tammy Tkach

In some fellowships, communion or the Lord's Supper is a quiet, solemn occasion, at times almost funeral. I used to be afraid to talk before or after our ceremony in an effort to preserve the solemnity. It was almost worse than a funeral. But it's not a funeral, even though we remember the One who died shortly after sharing a last supper with His friends. Jesus said whenever we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are to remember Him.

But how should we remember Him? Should we wail and grieve like a group of paid mourners? Should we cry and be sad? Do we remember Him by being guilt ridden and apologetic because our sins caused Him to go through an awful death—a criminal's death—on a Roman instrument of torture? Perhaps there's a time and place for that—not the guilt, but a time of repentance and confession. Possibly that is best done in private, although sometimes those emotions come out when we think on Jesus' death.

But what if we approach this time of remembrance from a different point of view? Jesus had a lot on His mind the night He sat down with His disciples to eat His last meal and talk with them one more time. He had spent three and a half years with these men and felt great affection for them. In Luke 22:15 He said, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." In Matthew 26:18 He said He was planning to *celebrate* it with them. He knew He wouldn't eat it again until the Kingdom of

God.

Let's remember Him¹ as the son of God who came to earth to live among us and to be one of us. He's the One who gave us, in the form of His person, freedom from the law, the chains of sin and the oppression of death. He gave us freedom from fear of the future, freedom to know the Father and freedom to be called children of God.

Let's be joyful as we remember the One God anointed

to preach good news to the poor, who was sent to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and to release the prisoners from darkness. He came to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, to comfort all who mourn and to provide for those who grieve. He bestows on us a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.²

Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before Him. It's hard to imagine joy so great. It

certainly was not human or earthly joy. It had to be the joy of being God! The joy of heaven! The joy of eternity! It's joy we can't begin to imagine or describe!

This is the One we remember—the One who changed our grief into joy and who invites us to share His life, now and in eternity. Let's remember Him with smiles on our faces, a shout of joy on our lips and with light hearts filled with the delight of knowing Christ Jesus our Lord! □



¹ Luke 22:19

² Isaiah 61

continued from page 7

*of 'remembrance' you want to be part of? Examine your motives, test your heart, come to this meal in holy awe.*²

Before we take the bread and wine, it is certainly worth pausing for a moment to remind ourselves of the wonderful situation Jesus has made possible. But such an examination is not a "do or die" nail-biting test before cautiously going ahead, hoping you are okay. It is a positive and confident proclamation of your

status as a forgiven and blessed believer on the road to immortal life. The purpose of the Lord's death and resurrection was to once and for all open up to us a new and guilt-free relationship with God. Communion is not intended to focus on what you *were* but on *who God has made you to be in Christ*. □

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:27–29

² 1 Corinthians 11:26–28

Every time you smile at someone, it is a gift of love, a gift to that person, a beautiful thing.

Mother Teresa

Purity of heart is blooming the same colours in the middle of the wilderness when no one sees you.

Vanna Bonta

God's promises are more dependable than our own feelings.

People, even more than things, have to be restored, renewed, revived, reclaimed, and redeemed; never throw out anyone.

Audrey Hepburn

In nature, broken things are cast aside; but in grace, God will never use a man until he is broken—broken by disappointment, by bereavement, by loss, by pain, by sickness. Remember that while to us broken things are tragedies and worthless, they are the only things God can use.

Dallas Willard

There are times when we do not know what God's purpose is; whether we will let the vision be turned into actual character depends upon us, not upon God.

People are like stained-glass windows. They sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but when the darkness sets in, their true beauty is revealed only if there is a light from within.

Elizabeth Ross

The fundamental difference between religion and Christianity is

that religion is all about what we try to do for a distant but watching God, whereas Christianity is about Jesus sharing His own experience of His Father with us through the Spirit of sonship.

Baxter Kruger

To have Jesus for our Brother, God for our Father, the Holy Spirit for our Comforter is a better portion than the richest, the proudest, or the most famous worldly ones can possibly have.

Charles H. Spurgeon

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

St. Francis of Assisi

He who has learned to obey will know how to command.

Solon

Character is doing the right thing when nobody's looking. There are too many people who think the only thing that's right is to get by, and the only thing that's wrong is to get caught.

J. C. Watts

Decisions become easier when your will to please God outweighs your will to please the world.

Anso Coetzer

People, places and things are the gifts of life, not the Source of life.

Gary Smalley

Imagination was given to man to compensate him for what he is not; a sense of humour to console him for what he is.

Francis Bacon

Evangelism without social work is deficient; social work without evangelism is impotent.

John R. Mott

What is in the well of the heart will come up through the bucket of the mouth.

I. Vernon McGee

I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.

Martin Luther

Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.

Hope is ability to hear the music of the future. Faith is having the courage to dance to it today. Raised voices lower esteem. Hot tempers cool friendships. Loose tongues stretch truth. Swelled heads shrink influence. Sharp words dull respect.

William Arthur Ward

The fellow that has no money is poor. The fellow that has nothing but money is poorer still.

Billy Sunday

God is not a riddle to be solved; He is a friend to be known and enjoyed.

Fil Anderson

Unbelief puts our circumstances between us and God, but faith puts God between us and our circumstances.

F. B. Meyer

The remarkable thing about fearing God is that when you fear God you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.

Oswald Chambers

It is one thing to say Jesus is all you want, until He's all you've got, and then you discover He's all you ever needed!

Vance Havner

Success is neither fame, wealth, nor power; rather it is seeking, knowing, and obeying God. If you seek, you will know; if you know, you will love; if you love, you will obey.

Charles Habib Malik

Let us work as if success depended upon ourselves alone; but with heartfelt conviction that we are doing nothing and God everything.

St. Ignatius of Loyola

Half the world is composed of people

who have something to say and can't and the other half have nothing to say and keep on saying it.

Robert Frost

The world suffers a lot. Not because of the violence of bad people, but because of the silence of good people.

Napoleon Bonaparte

I am thankful to all those who said No to me. It's because of them I did it myself.

Albert Einstein

It is very easy to defeat someone, but it is very hard to win someone over.

John Keats

Having courage does not mean that we are unafraid. Having courage and showing courage means we face our fears. We are able to say, "I have fallen, but I will get up."

Maya Angelou

It doesn't take such a great man to be a Christian; it just takes all there is of him.

Seth Wilson

A grace that does not deny ungodliness and worldly lusts is a disgrace. Everyone weeps in the same language.

Lester Roloff

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:

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The God revealed in

If we want the most accurate picture of God, we don't need to look any further than Jesus Christ. In Jesus we meet God as God really is. "He who has seen me," Jesus said, "has seen the Father."¹

Jesus Christ is the perfect revelation of the Father. No one has ever seen God, but Jesus Christ, the only Son of the Father, has made Him known.²

In Jesus' words and actions, we hear and see what matters most to every human being—that the Father loves us unconditionally. He sent Jesus out of His immeasurable love and His unbending commitment to human redemption. To know Jesus is to know God, which means that what we believe about Jesus is our theology.

In one way or another, we all have a theology. Simply stated, theology is "God knowledge". In other words, whatever we believe to be true about God is our theology.

And certainly every church and denomination has a theology. It's the framework that undergirds and informs their doctrines and practices.

Trinitarian theology sees the doctrine of the Trinity as the central and foundational doctrine that forms the basis for how we read the Bible and how we understand all points of theology.

It deals with not only the "how" and the "why" of doctrines and practices, but most importantly, it begins with the "who". It asks, "Who is the God made known in Jesus Christ, and who are we in relation to Him?"

Trinitarian theology, then, does not simply refer to a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity (the Bible teaching that there is one God, who is eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit). It refers to a Christ-centred way of

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understanding who God is.

Christ-centred

Trinitarian theology is first and foremost Christ-centred. As noted by Thomas F. Torrance (a leading Trinitarian theologian of the 20th century), Jesus is the unique

Word of God to humanity and the unique Word of humanity to God. Because of this, even Holy Scripture is under His Lordship.

Jesus indicates that He is the key to understanding Scripture. He said to a group of Jewish religious leaders in John 5:39–40: "You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life."

We seek to read and interpret the Bible through the lens of who Jesus is. He is the basis and logic of our theology—for He alone is the final and the full self-revelation of God.

Relationship-centred

Because it is Christ-centred, Trinitarian theology is by its very nature relational. Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, has become one with our flesh in order to be our saving substitute and to represent us as His brothers and sisters in the very presence of the Father.³

Because of Christ, we have a relationship with God! The Holy Spirit

dwells in us. We belong to the Father and are, in Christ, the beloved of the Father.

This means that the Christian life and faith are primarily about four kinds of personal relationships:

(1) the internal relationships of holy love shared by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit from all eternity,



Jesus Christ (Part 1)

- (2) the relationship of the eternal Son with humanity in Jesus Christ incarnate,
- (3) the relationship of humanity with the Father through the Son and by the Spirit, and
- (4) the relationship of human beings with one another as children of the Father redeemed by Jesus Christ.

Early history

In the 20th century, Trinitarian theology was advanced in the West largely through the work of Karl Barth and his students, especially Thomas F. Torrance and his brother James B. Torrance.

But this theology is as old as the Church itself. Trinitarian theology formed the basis of early Christian teaching. This is reflected in the Apostles' Creed, Nicene Creed and the Definition of Chalcedon. Early prominent Trinitarian teachers and theologians included Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Gregory of Nazianzus.

Irenaeus (died A.D. 202) was a disciple of Polycarp (who had studied with the apostle John). Irenaeus sought to show that the gospel of salvation taught by the apostles and handed down from them is centered on Jesus. He saw that the Bible presents the Incarnation as a new point of beginning for humanity. Through the Incarnation, the entire human race was "born again" in Jesus, delivered from the sin and death that had enslaved the world since Adam. In Jesus, humanity has a new beginning and a new identity.

The biblical foundation of Irenaeus' thinking included Paul's statements in Romans 5, where Jesus is presented to us as the "second" (or "final") Adam of the human race. "In Jesus," wrote Irenaeus, "God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man [Adam], that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man..." (*Against Heresies*, III.18.7)

Irenaeus understood that Jesus took all humanity into Himself, both as our representative before God and as our perfect substitute before God, thereby renewing the human race through His life, death, resurrection and ascension.

Irenaeus taught that this renewing, or re-creating, of the human race in Jesus through the Incarnation is not merely a work done "by" Jesus. Our salvation involves much more than just the forgiveness of our sins. It means our entire re-creation "in" and "through" Jesus.

Athanasius (died A.D. 373) defended the gospel against false teachers who denied the Son's eternal divinity. This defence led to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity affirmed at the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325. In his treatise *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius wrote the following:

Thus, taking a body like our own, because all our bodies were liable to the corruption of death, He surrendered His body to death in the place of all, and offered it to the Father. This He did out of sheer love for us, so that in His death all might die.... This He

did that He might turn again to incorruption men who had turned back to corruption, and make them alive through death by the appropriation of His body and by the grace of His resurrection... (Section 8)

What then was God to do? What else could He possibly do, being God, but renew His Image in mankind, so that through it men might once more come to know Him? And how could this be done, save by the coming of the very Image Himself, our Saviour Jesus Christ?

The Word of God came in His own Person, because it was He alone, the Image of the Father, Who could recreate man made after the Image. Thus it happened that two opposite marvels took place at once: the death of all was consummated in the Lord's body; yet because the Word was in it, death and corruption were in the same act utterly abolished. Death there had to be, and death for all, so that the due of all might be paid. (Section 13)

Wherefore the Word...being Himself incapable of death, assumed a mortal body, that He might offer it as His own in the place of all, and suffering for the sake of all through His union with it, "might bring to nought him that had the power over death, that is, the devil, and might deliver them who all their lifetime were enslaved by the fear of death." (Section 20)

By His death salvation has come to all men, and all creation has been redeemed (Section 37).

Athanasius and Irenaeus emphasised that the Incarnation, when the Son of God became a human being, affected all humanity. God chose to save humanity through the birth, life, sacrificial death and resurrection of the Incarnate Son of God. This is the essence of the gospel understood by the early church and revealed in the Scriptures.

Gregory of Nazianzus (died A.D. 389) wrote of how Christ shared in our broken humanity through His Incarnation:

That which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved. If only half Adam fell, then that which Christ assumes and saves may be half also; but if the whole of his nature fell, it must be united to the whole nature of Him that was begotten, and so be saved as a whole. (Epistle 101)

Christ united Himself with our actual condition, that is, with fallen humanity, not a pre-fall humanity, in order to redeem it. As J.B. Torrance was fond of saying, the doctor became the patient in order to heal us. It's important for us to know that God, in Christ, really loves us enough to embrace us at our sinful worst. □

(Part 2 will appear in the next issue)

¹ John 14:9

² John 1:18

³ John 1:14;
Ephesians

1:9–10, 20–23

⁴ Hebrews 2:14–15

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