

Is Jesus Really God?
A look at the Arian controversy.



**Acting Wisely
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CHRISTIAN Odyssey

February/March 2008

Exploring Life and Faith



**You'd Have To
Have Been There**

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Letters to the Editor

"Your magazine came recently, and it was fantastic. I am enjoying going over the articles and reading the Scriptures tied to them...Thank you again for all your good work and thoughtful writings."

JK, Pennsylvania

Just wanted to compliment the magazine on printing the article "Lovers of Pleasure." I totally agree with him and have noticed such a great change in the past seven years or so with young adults and their journey to have happiness and pleasure. One of the things that a lot of people noticed about my older daughter was her ability to find pleasure in the small things of life. Perhaps some of it is in each person's DNA, but I think that parents, media, etc. are reinforcing looking for pleasure in physical and material ways, not spiritual ways.

Most people are concerned with staying busy and not taking time to absorb God's goodness.

JB, Georgia

In your article, "Discovering Handel's Messiah," you mentioned that Handel was German, but somehow neglected to mention that he was Lutheran. I don't know how much of a music historian you are, but here is a piece of music trivia that few Americans know. When the organist at St. Mary's in Lubeck was about to retire, Handel, then 18 years of age, applied and auditioned for the position. The old organist was willing to name Georg Friedrich as his successor, but only if he fulfilled one condition. He had to marry the old organist's daughter. She was 34 years old and, in Handel's words, "...not fair to see." He and the other applicants, including Johann Matteson (and

later, J. S. Bach) (all of them Lutherans) all withdrew their applications and presence from Lubeck. The old organist was the renowned composer, Dietrich Buxtehude (yes, you guessed, also a Lutheran). All this might prove is that despite the large quantities of beer consumed by all concerned, the fledgling composers saw well enough to avoid an unhappy marriage.

W. T. Kan (also a Lutheran) email

Letters for this section should be addressed to "Letters to the Editor." Send your letters to Worldwide Church of God, PO Box 5005, Glendora, CA 91740-0730, or by e-mail to john.halford@wcg.org.

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

I've Been Reading...

I Sold My Soul on eBay

by Hemant Mehta

Reviewed by John Halford

I think it was Napoleon who said the two biggest mistakes military commanders can make is to underestimate their enemy and to believe their own propaganda. I think the same is true for evangelists. Especially at this time, when not just Christianity, but the whole concept of God and religion are under attack from some best-selling books by atheists.

They can make for difficult reading. Some are angry, aggressive, even sarcastic. Others have been poorly researched, showing little real understanding of Christianity. That is what makes Hemant Mehta's book so different. He is not consumed with bitterness, or on a crusade to discredit our faith. He describes himself as a "friendly atheist," and if a book by an unbeliever can be a breath of fresh air, this is it.

Mehta was raised as a Jain, a minority Indian religion. He abandoned it as a teenager, and became an atheist. After taking the unusual step of auctioning on eBay a promise to attend the church of the winning bidder, he began an investigation of the many versions of Christianity in the United States. The result is a fascinating look at Christians through the eyes of an observant and thoughtful outsider.



Far from trying to drive another nail into its coffin, Mehta sees much good in Christianity, and he wants it to succeed. His book is often critical, but always constructive. As he writes, "I am simply telling you how a variety of churches came across to me—a young adult who is a well-educated atheist, open to any compelling evidence for the existence of God" (p. 138). He sees much to praise, but does not pull his punches in describing what he saw as smugness, hypocrisy and superficiality. He frequently reminds us that he may have misunderstood, and it is tempting to dismiss some of his criticisms as picky. But if this is the honest impression of a friendly outsider, we ought to pay attention.

Mehta makes no attempt to undermine our faith or to promote his lack of it. His research does not have a trite "happy ending"; Mehta is still as much an atheist as he was at the beginning. But he is a friendly one, and he says, "I did gain a newfound respect for some churches, though, especially those that make a difference by helping people (Christian or otherwise). These are the churches that practice Christianity instead of just preaching it" (p. 159).

Any pastor or congregation serious about reaching the unreached will find much to think about in this quietly respectful, but devastatingly perceptive, look at ourselves as others see us.

Hemant Mehta, *I Sold My Soul on eBay*, Waterbrook Press, 2007.

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Depth perception

By John Halford

An important part of learning to drive is depth perception. Drivers need to know where they are in relation to the other vehicles around them. I think depth perception should also be a part of a Christian education. We are Christians in a certain moment in time. We need to understand our time in relation to what has gone before and what may come after.

Most of us have a rather hazy view of church history. We've probably heard of the Protestant Reformation, but have little idea what was "reformed" and why it needed to be. Our knowledge of the early church is even sketchier. You may have heard of such figures as Athanasius, Arius, Eusebius, Chrysostom, Constantine or Augustine. But what did they do, or say? Were they "good guys" or "bad guys"?

Early church history is sometimes presented as a struggle against a "great conspiracy," when, in a "lost century," the "faith once delivered" was undermined by "false prophets" who introduced "pagan" ideas.

That's an idea that seriously lacks historical "depth perception." The real story of the church is one of continual struggle, punctuated with moments of turmoil, as sincere but less-than-perfect men and women tried to respond to the challenges of their

ity in an article in this issue. I hope you will find it interesting, even if history is "not your thing."

Church history is not just the province of scholars. Our faith today also faces some important questions—about abortion, homosexuality, the role of women, the plight of the poor, evolution and an appropriate Christian response to the environmental crisis, to name only a few. Passions run high on all sides, and the answers are not easy. Some will disagree with that, claiming that the answers are so obvious there is no room for discussion. Here some depth perception will help.

As C. S. Lewis wrote, "Nothing strikes me more when I read the controversies of past ages than the fact that both sides were usually assuming without question a good deal which we should now absolutely deny. They thought that they were as completely opposed as two sides could be, but in fact they were all the time secretly united—united with each other and against earlier and later ages—by a great mass of common assumptions. We may be sure that the characteristic blindness of the twentieth century—the blindness about which posterity will ask, 'But how could they have thought that?'—lies where we have never suspected it."

Remember how just two centuries ago, sincere Christians vigorously defended slavery on biblical grounds? Within living memory, the Bible was invoked to support segregation and Apartheid? We should not be so

“Have we grasped today’s controversial issues correctly? What will future generations see as our “common assumptions”?”

times. Even the earliest Christians—those who knew and were taught by Jesus personally—took a long time to grasp something we now take for granted: that Gentiles should be accepted as equal partners in the faith.

In the second and third centuries other issues arose. Some of these would also leave us today saying, "Huh? *That* was a problem for them?"

Like, for example, a question about the nature of Jesus. "Was he really God in the flesh?" Or was he a created being, endowed by God with very special powers? Ideas and doctrines we now accept without question were once hot issues, debated with passion, tension and—sometimes, even intrigue.

We tell the story of the "battle" for Jesus' divin-

sure we have grasped today's controversial issues correctly. What will future generations see as our "great mass of common assumptions"?

Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide believers into all truth (John 16:13). But that guidance often comes by the Spirit working through fallible human beings. So politics, prejudice and intolerance compete with a genuine passion for the truth.

The story of the battle over the divinity of Jesus is instructive on many levels. A vital truth was preserved, but *how* it was preserved can leave us wincing. Let's learn from the past, not just to strive earnestly to maintain the integrity of the faith, but also to treat each other with the love, mercy and patience of Jesus while we are doing it. ●



Is Jesus Really God?

A Look at the Arian Controversy

By Mike Feazell

Few Christians are aware that two of the most fundamental doctrines of the Christian Faith—the divinity of Jesus Christ and the Trinity—were not finally decided until some 350 years after the death of Jesus.

Both doctrines were forged in the fourth century out of the religious and political firestorm sparked by Arius, a popular presbyter of the church in Alexandria, Egypt. Arius had a simple formula for explaining how Jesus Christ could be divine—and therefore worthy of worship along with God the Father—even though there is only one God.

The simple formula taught by Arius was well received by the common believers in Alexandria, but not by Arius' supervisor, bishop Alexander. Each man lined up supporters and the battle lines were drawn for what history would call the Arian Controversy. This bitter ordeal for the Christian churches of the eastern and western Roman Empire began in A.D. 318, led to the Creed of Nicea in 325 and finally ended with the Nicene Creed established at the Council of Constantinople in 381.

Monarchianism

Church Fathers from as early as the late 100s had been writing that the Word of God, the *Logos* of John 1:1-2, was co-eternal with the Father—and therefore uncreated and without beginning. The presbyter Arius was not the first to dispute this. Similar challenges had already arisen by the late second and early third centuries in the form of Monarchianism.

Monarchians fell into two broad categories. The Adoptionist or Dynamic Monarchians held that Jesus was only a man in whom dwelled the power of the supreme God.¹ The Modalist Monarchians taught that God revealed himself in three modes—as Father, Son and Spirit—but never at the same time. This preserved the idea of the full divinity of

the Son, but at the expense of any real distinction between the Son and the Father. Some Modalists believed that Jesus Christ was actually the Father in the flesh. All forms of Monarchianism were eventually branded as heresy and rejected by the Christian churches across the empire.

Arius

In one sense, Arius was simply the latest thinker to try to reconcile monotheism (belief in one God) with the Christian belief that Jesus Christ was divine. But there was a great difference between Arius' attempt and all previous efforts. No longer was Christianity an officially unsanctioned, often underground and persecuted religion. Now the Roman emperor Constantine had granted Christianity unprecedented legitimate status in the Empire, so that the question of who Jesus is could finally come before the whole Church to be settled.

Arius was a popular senior presbyter in charge of Baucalis, one of the twelve "parishes" of Alexandria in the early fourth century.² By A.D. 318, Arius had begun teaching his followers that the Son of God (who is also the *Logos* or Word of John 1:1-2) did not exist until the Father brought him into existence. To Arius, the Father first created the Word, and then the Word, as the Father's unique and supreme agent, created everything else.

“It took relentless, unwavering faith to hold fast to the truth that no being less than true God could in fact reconcile humanity to God.”

Arius' idea seemed to preserve monotheism as well as uphold the divinity of the Son, even if it was a bestowed divinity as distinct from the inherent and eternal divinity of the Father. With the help of catchy rhymes and tunes, Arius' ideas quickly caught on among the common converts of Alexandria.

Alexander

Alexander, the bishop of Alexandria, and his assistant, a presbyter named Athanasius, saw great

danger in Arius' teaching and took action to arrest it. Contrary to Arius' teaching that God was once without the Word, Alexander asserted that God *cannot* be without the Word, and that the Word is therefore without beginning and eternally generated by the Father.

Alexander sent letters to neighboring bishops requesting support and convened a council at Alexandria that excommunicated Arius and a dozen other clergy.³ Arius also sought backing, however, and obtained the support of several leaders, including Eusebius, the bishop of Nicomedia. Eusebius enjoyed a close relationship with Emperor Constantine, which would play a major role in the unfolding of the controversy. Another supporter of Arius was the historian, Eusebius of Caesarea, whose history of the early Christian church is still available today.

Constantine steps in

The Emperor Constantine became aware of the developing problem, and saw a need to resolve it. As Emperor, Constantine's concern was not so much for the unity of the Church as for the unity of the empire itself. Theologically, he viewed it as a "trifle."⁴ Constantine's first move was to send his religious advisor, Bishop Hosius of Cordova, Spain, to sort out the dif-

As the proceedings unfolded, however, thoughts of compromise quickly eroded. Once the tenets of the Arian position became clear, it did not take long for them to be rejected and condemned. The ideas that the Son of God is God only as a "courtesy title" and that the Son is of created status were vehemently denounced. Those who held such views were anathematized. The divinity of the Logos was upheld, and the Son was declared to be "true God" and co-eternal with the Father. The key phrase from the Creed established at Nicaea in 325 was "of the essence of the Father, God of God and Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father."

Homoousios (of the same essence) was the key Greek word. It was intended to convey, against the Arians, that the Son is equally divine with the Father. This it did, but it also left unanswered the question of how the Son and the Father, if they are of the same essence, are in fact distinct. Consequently, though Arianism was condemned and Arius banished, the Council of Nicaea did not see an end to the controversy.

Imperial reversals

Eusebius of Nicomedia, who presented the Arian cause to the Council and was deposed and banished for it, enjoyed a close personal relationship with Emperor Constantine. In time, he was able to convince Constantine to ease the punishment on the Arians, and to order Arius himself recalled from exile. Eventually, after a council at Jerusalem formally acquitted him of the charge of heresy in 335, Arius was to have been received back

A little letter makes a big difference

Athanasius and most other eastern bishops said that the Son was *homoousias* with the Father, meaning "of the same essence." The Arian theologians disagreed, but suggested a compromise: they could accept the word with the addition of only one letter, the smallest Greek letter, the iota. They said that the Son was *homoiousias* with the Father—a Greek word meaning "similar essence." But similarity is in the "i" of the beholder, and the Arians actually meant that Jesus was not the same kind of being as the Father. It would be like saying that he was "almost divine." The orthodox theologians could not accept that, and would not accept a word that allowed such an unorthodox interpretation.

ferences. Hosius was unsuccessful in bringing Arius and Alexander to peace, but he presided over a council in Antioch in early 325 that condemned Arianism and censured Eusebius of Caesarea.⁵ But the division continued, so Constantine called a universal council of the Church to settle the dispute.

Ancyra had been the original choice of venue, but Constantine changed the location to Nicaea, a city closer to his Nicomedia headquarters. The emperor personally opened the council in June of 325 with about 300 bishops present (most from the east). Constantine was looking for mutual tolerance and compromise. Many of the bishops present were also apparently prepared to find compromise.

into the fellowship of the church in Constantinople. Philip Schaff wrote: "But on the evening before the intended procession from the imperial palace to the church of the Apostles, he suddenly died (A.D. 336), at the age of over eighty years, of an attack like cholera, while attending to a call of nature. This death was regarded by many as a divine judgment; by others, it was attributed to poisoning by enemies; by others, to the excessive joy of Arius in his triumph."⁶

Athanasius, meanwhile, had succeeded Alexander as bishop of Alexandria in 328 only to be condemned and deposed by two Arian councils, one at Tyre under the presidency of Eusebius of Caesarea, and the other at Constantinople in about 335. He was then banished

Who was who?

• **Arius** (c. 250-336): Theologian in Alexandria, Egypt, a presbyter (an elder) of the church. He taught his followers that the Son of God did not exist until he was brought into existence by the Father.

• **Alexander of Alexandria** (d. 326): Bishop of Alexandria and Arius' supervisor. He strongly opposed Arianism.

• **Athanasius** (293-373): A presbyter of the church in Alexandria and assistant to Bishop Alexander. He later succeeded

Alexander as Bishop of Alexandria and spearheaded the effort to oppose Arianism and establish the Nicene faith.

• **Eusebius of Caesarea** (c. 263-339): Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine and author of several works chronicling the history of early Christianity, including *Ecclesiastical History*. He hoped for a compromise in the Arian controversy, and as a historian he recorded the proceedings at the Council of Nicea.

• **Eusebius of Nicomedia** (d. 341): Bishop of Nicomedia. He supported Ari-

us' ideas and presented the Arian side of the controversy at the Council of Nicea.

• **Constantine the Great** (272-337): Emperor of the Roman Empire who legalized Christianity in the Empire. He called the Council of Nicea in an effort to bring an end to the dispute among the churches that was threatening the security of the Empire.

• **Hosius of Cordova** (c. 256-358): Bishop of Cordova, Spain. He was sent to Alexandria by Constantine to mediate the Arian controversy.

by Constantine to Treves in Gaul in 336 as a disturber of the peace of the church.⁷

This turn of events was followed by the death of Constantine in 337 (who received the sacrament of baptism on his deathbed from the Arian Eusebius of Nicomedia). Constantine's three sons, Constantine II, Constans, and Constantius succeeded him. Constantine II, who ruled Gaul, Great Britain, Spain, and Morocco, recalled Athanasius from banishment in 338. In the east, however, matters were quite different. Constantius, who ruled the east, was firmly Arian. Eusebius of Nicomedia, the leader of the Arian party, was appointed Bishop of Constantinople in 338. Before long, war in the west between Constantine II and Constans gave Constantius a free hand to again exile Athanasius in 340.

When Constantine II died, however, and the western empire was united under Constans, Constantius had to follow a more moderate line with the Nicene party. The two emperors called a general council in Sardica in 343, presided over by Hosius, at which the Nicene doctrine was confirmed. Constans also compelled Constantius to restore Athanasius to his office in 346.⁸

Semi-Arianism

When Constans died in 350, the pendulum swung again. Constantius, now the sole emperor and still Arian, held councils supporting Arianism and banished bishops who opposed their edicts, including Hosius and Athanasius. By now, Arianism had itself become divided into two factions. One party had slightly modified its position to affirm *homoiousios*, or similarity of essence, rather than the original *heteroousios*, or difference of essence, still held by the strictest Arians.

This "compromise," sometimes called "semi-Arianism," still represented an unbridgeable chasm from the orthodox *homoousios*, or same essence. It only served to pit the Arians against one another. For Nicenes who still

had difficulty with the apparent lack of distinction between the Father and the Son represented by *homoousios*, though, the semi-Arian *homoiousios* did, for a time, afford a reasonable compromise. In any case, by the time of the death of Constantius, the Church had become Arian, at least on the surface.

More Imperial reversals

It was the death of Constantius in 361 that set the stage for the permanent triumph of Nicene faith. Julian the Apostate became emperor and implemented a policy of toleration for all the Christian parties. Though Julian's policy, at first glance, seems positive toward Christianity, his real hope was that the opposing factions would destroy one another. He recalled the exiled bishops, including Athanasius (though Athanasius was soon banished again as an "enemy of the gods" but was again recalled by Julian's successor Jovian).⁹

It was through the efforts of Athanasius that the concerns of the Nicenes and the semi-Arians about blurring the distinction between the Father and the Son were assuaged. Athanasius argued that *homoousios* could be interpreted in such a way as to affirm the same essence as long as the distinction between the Father and Son were not destroyed. In other words, he made it plain that "same essence" must retain the unity but never be allowed to destroy the distinctions in the Godhead. With this understanding, along with the compelling work of the Cappadocian bishops, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Gregory of Nyssa, the Nicene faith again began to gain ascendancy.

Julian died in 363, and was followed by Jovian, who was favorable toward Athanasius and the Nicene faith. His reign was short, though, ending in 364. He was succeeded by Valens, a fanatical Arian, whose intensity against both semi-Arians and Nicenes tended to bring those two parties together. In 375, he was followed by Gratian, who was of Nicene faith, and who recalled all

the exiled orthodox bishops.

By the end of Gratian's reign, Arianism was greatly waning in intellectual defense and in morale. At last, it was the long reign of Theodosius I, who was educated in the Nicene faith, that finally ended the long controversy. He required all his subjects to confess the orthodox faith. He appointed a champion of Nicene faith, Gregory of Nazianzus, as patriarch of Constantinople in 380. In 381, Gregory presided over the Council of Constantinople.

Council of Constantinople

The Council of Constantinople affirmed the Creed of Nicaea, altering it only slightly and in non-essential ways. It is the form of the Creed adopted at Constantinople that today bears the name Nicene Creed. The controversy was at last ended in the empire. However, Arianism would continue to impact the Church for the next two centuries in the form of the various peoples outside the empire who had become Christians according to the Arian faith (most of whom scarcely even knew the difference).

Athanasius, who had so diligently and unswervingly

opposed the Arian heresy, did not live to see the conflict ended. He died in 373 in his native Alexandria. In the end, the unyielding Athanasius is a fair representation of the unyielding truth of the orthodox Christian faith. Fundamental to the validity of Christianity is the reality of redemption, made possible only by the work of no being less than true God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Arius believed that a Christ designated as divine by virtue of his special creation could serve as true Redeemer and true Mediator between God and humanity. It took the dogged, relentless, unwavering faith of an Athanasius to hold fast to the truth that no being less than true God could in fact reconcile humanity to God.

The apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth: "No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval" (1 Corinthians 11:19). Likewise, the Arian controversy became an essential waypoint on the journey of the church, for despite the trial and pain of controversy, the truth of the nature of the divine One who had come to redeem humanity had to be made plain. ●

1 Clyde Manschreck, "Monarchianism," in *Dictionary of Bible and Religion* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 704.

2 David Wright, "Councils and Creeds," *The History of Christianity* (Herts, England: Lion Publishing, 1977), 156.

3 Wright, 157.

4 Wright, 159.

5 William Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 19.

6 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910;

reprinted by Eerdmans, 1987), vol. III, 663.

7 Schaff, 663.

8 Schaff, 635.

9 Schaff, 638.

In Other Words

When Trees Grow Together

By Kalengule Kaoma

An African Jacaranda tree graces our front yard. It is quite leafy right now, and a couple of months ago, lavender flowers populated its closely growing branches. Our Jacaranda reminds me of a proverb of the Bemba people of Northern Zambia, which goes like this: "*Imisambo ya miti iikulila pamo taibula ukushenkana.*" A rough English translation would be, "Branches growing closely together will inevitably rub against each other."

Bemba elders and community leaders use this proverb to encourage people to forgive and consider each other's weaknesses as part of the package of living together. Without forgiveness, people do not live in harmony. Animosity, self-centeredness, bitterness, pride, envy, and jealousies rule our lives when grudges and unforgiveness take control of our relationships.

Peace, pleasantness and happy relationships grow out of forgiveness. A wise man said a long time ago, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers [and sisters] live together in unity." These words are applicable today as well.



Husbands and wives ought to forgive each other. Parents and children need forgiveness. Superiors and subordinates work better when forgiveness dominates their differences and offenses. Neighbors who bury their quarrels under the

rock bed of forgiveness solidify their neighborliness.

When we forgive each other and accommodate the "weak," we will bloom and contribute to the well-being of our families and communities. Branches growing closely together do inevitably rub against each other, but what a different world it would be if we all practiced forgiveness. ●

The Beauty Within



By Anne Gillam

It was a warm summer's day, so my daughter, two grandsons and I decided to visit the rummage sale at the Bonanza Catholic Church. At the door my youngest grandson halted and backed up, afraid to go in, even though many of the people rummaging there were familiar faces. My grandson has autism, and occasionally closed-in and unfamiliar places frighten him.

After a quick change in plan we headed over to a hobby fair at a nearby park. In the open-air setting, my grandson was spared the sensory overload he had experienced at the rummage sale.

As we entered the fair we scattered like marbles toward the booths and displays that filled our various interests. Each one of us was carried on by the momentum of excitement.

I bounced from a booth offering beautiful quilts to a booth selling uniquely designed bird houses. As the momentum carried me on to a display for a local garden club, I thought of resting there and joining them. Then I saw it—a booth featuring another of the loves of my life—rock-collecting. I decided to stop there.

I always say that when the Lord calls me home he will have to check my pockets because I might be trying to sneak in my rocks. You may think me crazy, but I find great comfort in just holding rocks in my hand. To me they are things of beauty made by God's personal touch.

A local rock shop had a fair booth where you could pick out a rock and they would cut it for you. There were buckets of thunder eggs, each bucket marked with a different price. A small voice seemed to say, "Pick one," so I willingly obeyed. Reaching for a rock is a natural movement of my hand.

Thunder eggs are ball-shaped masses of rock that can range in size from one inch to several feet. Their outer shell is drab and bumpy but it is the core that holds the prize. The rock I chose was chocolate brown on the outside and nothing to be desired, but when it was cut in half, it revealed a beautiful crystalline center.

As I held the cut rock in my hand I once again heard that small voice. It reminded me of 1 John 3:2, which reads, "Dear friends, now we are the children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is."

We, just like a thunder egg, might appear from the outside to be rather plain, but much is going on inside. God is fashioning a thing of beauty within us. The apostle Paul wrote, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The rock I held in my hand was rough and plain on the outside, but like many people, it held a treasure of God's beauty within. The rock's interior was unique; a work of art. We also are works of art in God's hands. We might be rough and plain on the outside, but we are God's unique and beautiful handiwork on the inside.

“The rock in my hand was rough and plain on the outside, but it held a treasure of God's beauty within.”

I am grateful for the lesson I learned from God through the wonderful gift of rocks; that I need to look for the beauty in every person around me. I try to remember the special place each person holds in God's heart and the special place they hold in God's plans. As I look at the amazing beauty that God created within this drab rock, I am reminded of the wonderful work God is doing in each one of his children and I am excited about the transformation of the beauty within. ●

Anne Gillam is Pastor of the Worldwide Church of God congregation in Klamath Falls, Oregon.

You'd Have to Have Been There

By Kerry Gubb

Right now, my country is parched—panting weakly in the throes of thirst. “Worst drought in history” is how our Prime Minister describes it.¹ That’s saying a lot for an island that is two-thirds desert.

“Australia is going through a horrible transition as we adjust to climate change and there are places where farming isn’t going to be able to be continued,” says Professor Peter Cullen, of the Wentworth group of scientists.² Josh Gordon reports in *The Age* newspaper: “The latest rural snapshot from the Bureau of Statistics...shows a mass exodus from the land, the lowest sheep and lamb numbers since the end of World War II and an ageing farm workforce.”³

Most of us live in cities, though, where glamour and glitz work their magic, masking the sad reality that the land itself is starting to die of thirst. Many of us can see a coastal thunderstorm clearing the street gutters and think the drought has broken. Those closest to the drought, however—the farmers—face a much harsher reality. According to a *Reuters* report in South Africa’s *Independent Online*, “every four days, a farmer commits suicide under the stress of failing crops, dying livestock and debt as the worst drought in 100 years bites deep into the nation’s psyche and erodes economic growth.”⁴ Unless sustained, seasonal rains come soon, we’ll learn the hard way just how long we can thrive on glamour and glitz.

It’s no mystery to me that the apostle Paul can describe creation as groaning in sore labor (Romans 8:22). I feel it, too! (verse 23). I’ve watched sun-scorched, drought-dried leaves open up slowly during a shower of rain, fill and soften with life-restoring moisture, then stand upright again in silent thanks to their Father in heaven for relieving their plight. Browns and yellows restored to rich greens overnight. Experiencing up close a drought-breaking is an awesome experience. I long to see it happen again in my country.



Recently I visited Huka Falls in New Zealand, a narrow canyon through which bursts the crystal-clear, snow-fed Waikato River, bringing life to the many rich farmlands downstream. Objectively, there are higher, bigger, “better” falls, even in New Zealand. Huka, however, took away my breath in a single, precious moment. To appreciate why, *I guess you have to have been there.*

The saying goes that “when the student is ready the teacher will come.” Weighed down with thoughts of the drought back home, I was suddenly confronted with a roaring, gushing, bubbling, never-ending torrent of sparkling water, surging, crashing, shaking the ground beneath my feet with sheer brute force, charging the air with untamed, raw, irresistible intensity—the very air pulsating with its life-breath—erupting from a turbulent plunge-pool to continue its life-imparting journey through rich volcanic soils.

This was a place of God’s presence. Where God’s love for his creation is sovereign, there is life, hope and renewal.

I could tell you that the water was a wondrous shade of turquoise—but to fully appreciate just how wondrous, *you’d have to have been there.*



Visiting Huka Falls hasn't fixed the drought. But it's done something profound for me. But I guess to appreciate just how reassuring that moment was, *you'd have to have been there.*

I could tell you that this mighty torrent shouted the very words of God: "Let there be life!" But to fully grasp this, *you'd have to have been there.*

Standing enveloped in the awesome aura of this vibrant handiwork of God, a similar scene dredged itself up from ancient memory banks of biblical images. The prophet Ezekiel describes a split in the Mount of Olives through which a torrent of living water flows from beneath the temple of God, bringing restoration, hope and life wherever it goes—to the ends of the earth. That scene wasn't hard to imagine, standing there as I was, wrapped in a living example complete with sound effects to seriously challenge the very best sub-woofer:

"I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple..."; "he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep"; "another thousand

cubits...knee-deep...another thousand...water that was up to the waist"; "another thousand...but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross"; "a great number of trees on each side of the river"; "water flows toward the east...enters the [Dead] Sea.

"When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh"; "Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live"; "Fishermen will stand along the shore...fish will be of many kinds—like the fish of the Great Sea"; "Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing."⁵

Literal or metaphorical? It doesn't really matter. What's more, I don't really care. The intent is, unarguably, to reassure us in our thirsty, afflicted, polluted, grieving world that when God is sovereign, there is life and hope and rejuvenation on a scale vastly surpassing Huka Falls or anywhere else one might stand inspired on the earth today contemplating the kingdom of God in its fullness.

I'm back home now. The coast has had some more rain; many city-dwellers aren't too immediately concerned about or focused (for the moment) on the drought that continues further inland, where our food should be produced.

The law of averages may break the drought, as it always has. But environmentalists seem to think we've been messing around too much with the law of averages, that past trends may not continue indefinitely. The phrase "impending disaster" is written and spoken more often these days. So I don't know what lies immediately ahead for my "wide brown land."⁶ I am, however, reassured that once Jesus Christ has completed his salvation work and the sovereignty of God is restored with humanity, that life, hope and rejuvenation are guaranteed.

Visiting Huka Falls hasn't fixed the drought. But it's done something profound for me. But I guess to appreciate just how reassuring that moment was, *you'd have to have been there.*

Then again, if you've ever been anywhere contemplating this world and yearning for the next, *you have been there.*

Haven't you? ●

1 Jewel Topsfield, "\$150,000 to leave the land" (Melbourne, Australia: *The Age*, 25 Sept. 2007). Available online: www.theage.com.au/news/national/150000-to-leave-the-land/2007/09/25/1190486309981.html.

2 Ibid.

3 Josh Gordon, "We slid off the sheep's back, now sliding off the land, too"

(*The Age*, 15 July 2003). Available online: www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/07/15/1058035006992.html.

4 Michael Perry, "Drought-hit Australia battles climate change" (Cape Town, South Africa: Independent Online, 1 Nov. 2006). Available online: www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=14&click_

www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=14&click_id=143&art_id=qw1162366201639B251. Ezekiel 47:1-12.

6 A reference to Dorothea Mackellar's classic poem "My Country," about Australia. Available online: www.eurekacouncil.com.au/Australian-Culture/Australian-Literature-Poetry/my-country.htm.

Acting Wisely During

Christian Odyssey: There is talk of a recession. What exactly is a recession?

Brent Baker: A recession is simply a decline in business activity. The United States has been experiencing economic growth over the last few years, so a slowdown in growth or an eventual decline in business activity is inevitable.

CO: How would this affect the average person?

BB: During a short and mild recession, many people might not be affected at all. But if the business activity continued to slow down, declining sales might require companies to lay off workers. The resulting feeling of uncertainty could cause people to lose confidence in the economy and postpone spending on non-necessary items. Even though they might have the money, they would save it in case things were to get worse.

CO: Are there steps we can take to minimize the effect on our families?

BB: Yes, and it is not rocket science. Many people spend everything they earn (or even more than they earn by using credit) and have nothing left to save for a reserve. To minimize the effect of recession on our families, I recommend getting your personal financial situations under control and planning to build sufficient reserves.

CO: What would constitute “sufficient reserves”?

BB: Financial planners generally recommend having enough savings to meet three to six months of family expenses. That way, if something unexpected happens or if you lose your job, you will have a reserve to help get you through. The idea of saving enough money to cover three to six months of expenses may sound unrealistic, but it can be achieved using discipline and creativity. Try writing down everything you spend for one month. Chances are you will find that you are spending money on several items or services that you can do without. You can use that extra money to start your savings plan. For example, if you are spending \$3 a day on a drink or snacks at work or school, cutting out just that one expense could result in \$60 of extra money to invest or save over the course of one month, or \$720 a year!

CO: How much debt is “safe” in time of recession?

BB: That’s a good question, and one that many people never ask. Most people “qualify” for much more debt than they should realistically take on. Just because you are told you qualify for a loan or credit card does not mean it would be wise for you to actually get them. Generally, you should keep your monthly debt payments, including mortgage, below 30 percent of your gross income (before taxes and deductions). When you get beyond that level you may find that you don’t have enough left over to save,



invest or even to meet some basic needs.

Many people get into trouble with their credit cards by spending more than they can pay off each month. If you aren’t able to limit your spending, then consider using a debit card instead or paying with cash. Ideally, you should strive to have enough savings on hand to cover all purchases, including your vehicles.

CO: Economists warn that if everyone stopped spending and adopted a siege mentality, it might actually trigger, and maybe prolong a recession. So what is a responsible approach?

BB: A responsible approach is to manage our own finances to have enough reserves to meet your obligations even during an economic downturn. If

a Recession

A conversation with Brent Baker



If the potential for recession has caused you to consider that you need to get your finances in order, that's good. But really we should get our finances in order whether or not we are concerned about a recession.

you believe that a recession is coming, it might be wise to hold off on major purchases until you feel comfortable that your income will be stable. But a recession can also be a great time to purchase items or to invest in stocks and mutual funds because prices often decline as a result of decreasing demand for goods or services. The key is to be in control of your financial situation so that you can react sensibly to the situation rather than have events overwhelm you.

CO: *Where can people turn for help who are already in serious financial trouble? There are many advertisements offering debt consolidation, or low-interest loans, etc.*

BB: You have to be careful. Sometimes this can be helpful, but it can also compound the problem. Identifying the real source of your problem is very important.

For example, if people have a problem in controlling their spending and go through debt consolidation without addressing the spending problem, they probably will make matters worse. If you are in serious financial trouble, seek help from someone you trust who has financial expertise. They may be able to help you see something about your situation that you can't see yourself. There are many reasons for financial problems: lack of sufficient skills for a decent paying job, uncontrolled spending, divorce, a serious accident or illness, or just failing to manage resources responsibly.

I like the idea of a financial management program that holds regular group sessions, as that can be cost effective, and it encourages you to make yourself accountable to the group. The resulting positive peer pressure can be a great motivator to get finances in order.

Using a reliable debt counselor may be a good choice, but be aware of deceptive credit counseling practices where there is an offer of a "quick fix" to your credit. Often they are actually working with debt-collection agencies. And most will charge for their services. Can

you afford the extra expense? Your local Better Business Bureau may be able to give you some insight into the reputation of a financial planner or debt counselor.

Some companies have debt-management assistance programs for their employees. If your employer offers this, it may be free to you.

I have heard good things about the material from Crown Ministries (www.crown.org), but I do not have personal experience of them.

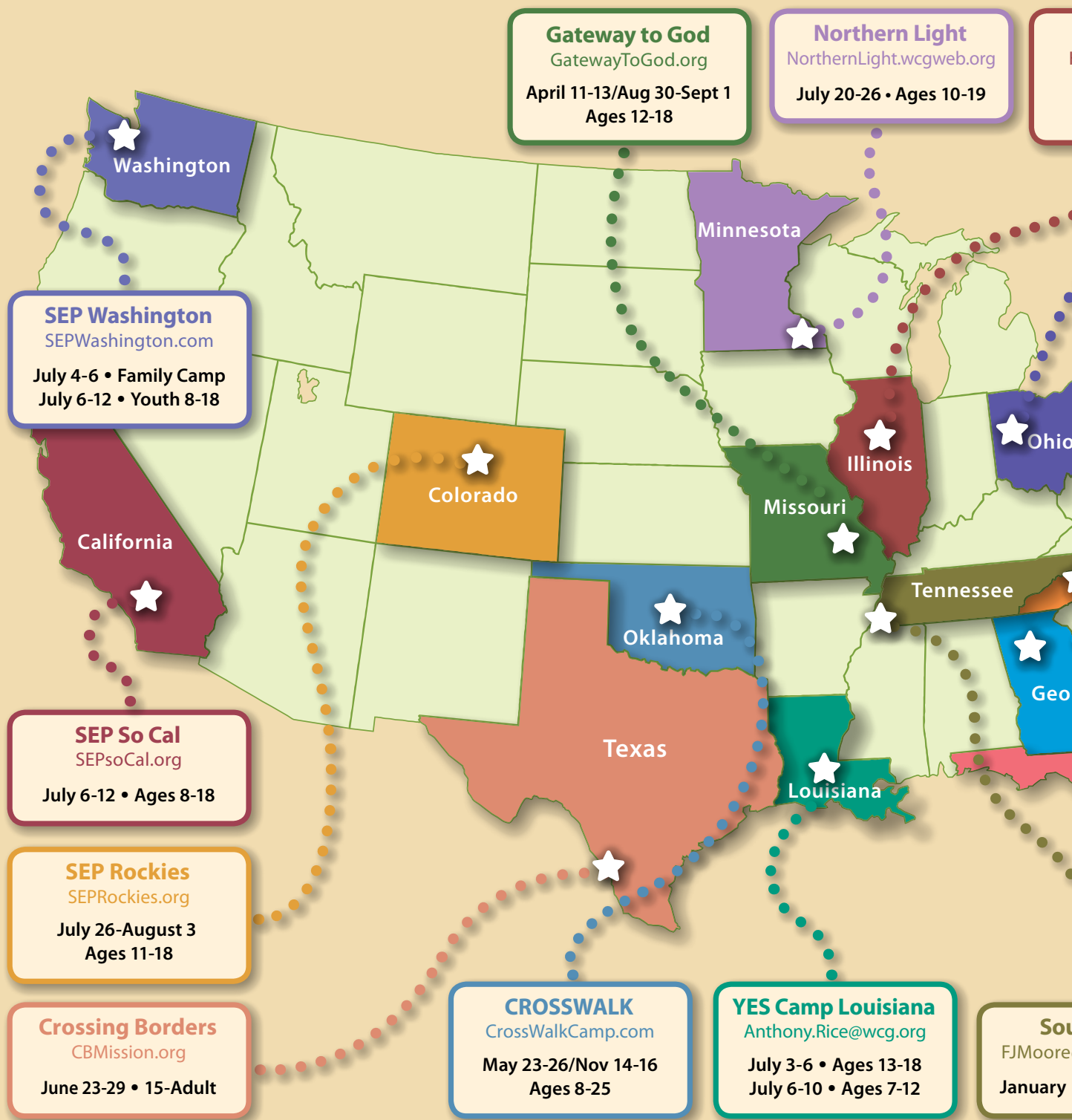
CO: *When times get rough and money gets short, it is necessary to cut back on discretionary spending. What is a responsible approach to contributions to church and charity under these circumstances?*

BB: The principle of giving is an important part of our financial plan, and we should build donations into our spending plan so we can contribute regularly and at a sustainable level. Many people wish they could give more than they are giving currently, and getting our finances in order will position us to be able to give more and to give on a consistent basis.

I would like to share a couple of thoughts in closing. If the potential for recession has caused you to consider that you need to get your finances in order, then that's good. But really we should get our finances in order whether or not we are concerned about a recession. Also, everyone's situation is different, so I can only offer general advice in this interview. If you have questions, it's a good idea to seek advice from a professional who can consider the facts of your individual situation. ●

Brent Baker has worked in the financial services industry for more than 22 years and is currently the Investment Services Risk Manager for a financial services company. He conducts seminars on responsible personal financial management. Brent is Assistant Pastor of Christ Fellowship Church in Cincinnati.

Worldwide Church of God Generations Ministries Camps 2008



I Am Pilate's Wife

By Joyce Catherwood

Matthew 27:11-66

I woke up suddenly, startled and shaken. I stared at the ceiling, momentarily relieved, thinking my nightmare about Jesus was only a dream. But angry voices coming through the windows of our residence brought me back to reality. And my heart sank. I had been deeply disturbed by the news of Jesus' arrest as I retired for the evening. I didn't know why he had been taken and accused of crimes that could cost his life. He had helped so many in need.

From my window, I could see the judgment seat where my husband Pilate, the Roman governor, conducted public hearings. I heard him shout: "Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus, who is called Christ?" And I knew this could only mean that events throughout the night had not gone well for Jesus. Pilate may have naively thought the hostile crowd would free him. But the mob had been enraged by wild accusations from the jealous chief priests and elders, so they screamed for Jesus to be crucified. Some of these were the same people who only weeks before had followed him everywhere receiving healing and hope.

Jesus stood there so alone, despised and rejected. He was not a criminal. I knew that, and my husband knew that, but things were out of control. Someone had to intervene. So I grabbed a servant by the arm and told him to go tell Pilate not to have anything to do with those proceedings, and that I had suffered greatly because of a dream about Jesus. But it was too late. My husband gave into their demands. In a cowardly attempt to rid himself of any responsibility, he washed his hands in front of the crowd, declaring he was innocent of Jesus' blood. I moved from the window and slumped to the floor, weeping. My soul ached for this compassionate, humble man who traveled everywhere healing and delivering the oppressed.

As Jesus hung on the cross, the brilliant afternoon sun gave way to an ominous darkness. Then as Jesus gasped his last breath, the earth shook, splitting rocks and leveling structures. Tombs broke open, releasing dead people who came back to life. All of Jerusalem had been brought to its knees. But not for long. These terrifying events weren't enough to stop the brazen Jewish leaders. They scrambled through the rubble to Pilate and foolishly conspired with him to secure Jesus' grave so his disciples could not steal his body and claim he rose from the dead.

Three days have now passed and Jesus' followers are indeed proclaiming he is alive! They insist they have seen him! Those who came back from their graves now walk the streets of Jerusalem. I am overjoyed! I dare not tell my husband, but I will not rest until I learn more about this amazing man who defied death and promises eternal life. ●

The theme this year is "Join the Journey." Here are the dates and locations for the summer camps offered by Generation Ministries in 2008. Full details of each camp's facilities, programs and costs can be found by going to the individual web sites.

Heartland SEP
HeartlandCamp.org
July 27-August 2
Ages 10-19

Pathways
PathwaysCamp.com
July 13-18 • Ages 8-17

New Heights
NewHeightsCamp.com
August 17-23 • Ages 8-18

Camp SonDance
CampSonDance.org
July 6-12 • Ages 6-16

Camp Keystone
Tom.Smith@wcg.org
July 23-27 • Ages 8-18

Higher Ground
CarolinaCamp.com
July 20-26 • Ages 8-18

The Mountaintop
MountainTopCamp.org
April 25-27 • Ages 8-19

SEP Florida
SEPFlorida.com
July 3-7 • Ages 6-19

Unleashed Out
@bellsouth.net
July 1-4 • Ages 8-18

In Remembrance of What?

By John Halford

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

I belong to our local ministerial association. A regular part of our monthly meeting is a short devotional given by one of the members. At a recent meeting it was the turn of Chuck Clayton, the supervising pastor at one of the local churches.

Chuck said he had been thinking recently about 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."

Well, yes. We all knew those verses. It is pretty much standard fare for a communion service. Our

"Jesus did not say, 'Do this in remembrance of what you have done.' He asked us to do it in remembrance of what he did."

individual churches might have different methods of taking communion, but we all agreed on this basic understanding. "So," Chuck said, "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 recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."

"How do you explain that?" he asked.

Well, it seems pretty obvious. Before taking the

Lord's Supper, you examine yourself, to see if you are worthy. I well remember preaching the importance of doing this in my church's more legalistic past. Surely, such an examination really underlines the seriousness of the ceremony. Or does it? Does this verse, if not explained properly and in context, actually *undermine* the significance of communion?

What kind of examination should it be? 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?

I could see by the expressions of my colleagues that I was not the only one with some legalism in my background. "So what does it mean?" asked Chuck, and then explained it in a way I had not thought of before. After the meeting I told him, "I found that really helpful. And I know many people who might need it too. Do you mind if I plagiarize it?"

"Go ahead," he said. So I have.

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

Always, after such sermons, I 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 seen ministers hold the microphone so it would amplify the sound of breaking unleavened bread. The congregation was encouraged to imagine the crack of the scourge and the pounding of the nails into Jesus' flesh.

Forgiveness and Faith

By C. Baxter Kruger

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. 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 realize 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 of ‘remembrance’ you want to be part of? Examine your motives, test your heart, come to this meal in holy awe.”

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*. ●

Two centuries ago, a Scottish barrister named Thomas Erskine wrote a book titled *The Unconditional Freeness of the Gospel*. It remains one of the most important books I have ever read. In this book Erskine solved a critical and practical theological problem for me, and I hope for you.

According to Erskine, the gospel is the good news that God has forgiven the human race. Forgiveness is to be proclaimed as an accomplished fact. It is universal. It is finished. It includes the whole race of humanity. And it is unconditional. Many, of course, believe this to be the plain truth of the gospel. I know I do. Yet there are many others who are deeply troubled by such an unconditional message. Why then is the New Testament so full of the call to faith and repentance? If we are all forgiven forever, what difference does it make if we believe the gospel or not? And what does such a *free* declaration mean for living the Christian life?

What troubled Erskine was that the gospel had been so watered down to avoid these pitfalls that it had become an ambiguous message in which forgiveness was made dependent upon us, whether through faith or works. *If* we repent and *if* we believe, *then and only then* will God forgive us. Erskine knew that if our forgiveness depends on us or on what we do or believe in any way, then we will never find healing for our broken souls.

“I think that much of the theoretical difficulty on this matter has arisen from the habit of considering heaven merely as a reward, and hell merely as a punishment—and pardon as the deliverance from hell, and the introduction into heaven” (p. 8). Erskine is here making a critical distinction between forgiveness and heaven. For Erskine, heaven is the *life* we experience as our broken souls are bathed with the Father’s love. Hell is the life, so to speak, we experience when we don’t know the Father’s love at all. “Christianity may be considered as a divinely revealed system of medical treatment for diseased spirits. Heaven is the name for health in the soul, and hell is the name for disease; and the design of Christianity is to produce heaven, and to destroy hell” (p. 9).

For Erskine, people who have not heard that they are forgiven—and believed it to be the truth—are not whole, healthy, spiritually flourishing people. They are riddled with fear, not peace; self-centeredness, not love; hopelessness, not assurance. Their soul is profoundly dis-eased. They are miserable, sad and broken.

The gospel—the news of our unconditional forgiveness by God—is spiritual medicine for our devastated souls. For it shouts to us that we are loved forever, accepted and embraced by the Father himself. “Pardon, then, is not heaven—any more than a medicine is health. Pardon is proclaimed freely and universally—it is perfectly gratuitous—it is unconditional and unlimited—but heaven is limited to those who are sanctified by the belief of the pardon” (p. 11). Believing in our Father’s love and forgiveness is to take the spiritual medicine that heals our pain-riddled souls. Refusing to believe in our Father’s love never changes the fact that we are loved and forgiven; but it leaves our souls unhealed. ●



Dr. C. Baxter Kruger is the Director of Perichoresis Ministries and the President of Mediator Lures, which manufactures specialty fishing lures. For more information visit www.perichoresis.org.

Running Away from *Intimacy*



By Mark Mounts

We Christians are supposed to be happy. Even when—*especially when*—things go wrong. We are not immune from the difficult moments of life—a health breakdown, an employment crisis, financial troubles, addictions or relationship problems. Yet, armed with our faith in God, we are supposed to handle them better than we would without faith, and in doing so, show others “the hope that lies within us.”

So why don't we? What is going wrong? In this article, I would like to offer some insight, and I hope some encouragement, to those who are disillusioned with their human relationships and experiences.

The root of the problem

Let's look at two key dynamics of the human experience: needs and intimacy. I think it's reasonable to say that we all have needs. How we got them and where we look to have them fulfilled is another story. You see, when we say we have needs, we are also admitting that we have expectations about how those needs will be met. And, if there is anything that will make Christians aware of what they feel they need, it's a trial or test of some kind.

Many Christians are looking for a particular person who will fulfill all their needs; maybe even heal their pain. When this doesn't happen, it opens the door for the negative emotions of sorrow, disappointment, anger, depression, isolation, and even bitterness. These emotions can make people focus even more on how much they feel their “needs,” and so begins a downward spiral of their relationships. Eventually, we even drag God into the “hell hole” we have created for ourselves.

Surely we can all identify with this in some way. We all want someone we can truly trust, someone who can “be there” for us and understand. In other words, we want an intimate relationship. I'm talking about the need for relationships that touch the heart, soul, and mind. Sometimes we wonder if we really do want it, because this can be the place where we feel really out of control.

Is there anyone reading this who has not been disappointed or let down by someone they were looking to fulfill their needs, especially in the middle of a trial or crisis? In fact, the ones we expect to understand us best are the ones who have the greatest potential to disappoint us. It is most likely that it will be a close relative, a church member, a pastor, a friend at work...anyone we feel we know well and can trust...who will be the one to let us down. Or at least, fail to meet our expectations. How sad it is that those who were once close to us—in a family or a church fellowship—often end up being the most estranged.

What's the answer?

So how do we establish relationships that will not let us down? Where do we find a friend who will accept us unconditionally? Who will not run from us, but always be there no matter what, and fully understand our needs and deepest longings?

You know what I am going to say, don't you? Right—that relationship can come only from God. But that is not just a platitude or a religious cliché. Let's unpack that.

Have we ever considered that the reason our needs are not being fully met in our human relationships or ventures is because we were designed to look somewhere else? And have we ever considered that the misunderstandings that we have with each other—misunderstandings that often shatter relationships—can be used to strengthen the bonds between us?

You see, in order to accept that our needs will not be completely met by people or situations, we must be brutally honest with the limitations of the people around us. Even with the best of intentions, our best friends and even family members will let us down. And we will let them down. That is why we all need to have a personal and intimate relationship with God and learn to put our ultimate trust in him.

But—and this is vital to understand—we also need each other. It is not God's intention for us to retreat into a hermit-like existence with just "me and God," however tempting that might be when relationships start to go sour. There are valuable lessons to be learned in close relationships with others, and God wants us to experience these—including when, make that especially when, things start to go wrong.

Our first reaction is to retreat and spare ourselves more pain and heartache. So we "run away from home." We abandon our families. We leave the church. We quit the ministry. We turn to drink, take drugs, become sexually promiscuous, feed on pornography, and find a new partner, a new church, a new job. But the pain really never goes away. How can it? By running away you are actually running further into the problem.

Running towards intimacy

Life does not have to be a vicious cycle of misdirected, unresolved emotions leading to bitterness and broken friendships. Have you noticed how often the Bible focuses us on the need to preserve, maintain and also repair relationships? Intimacy is not to be gained by running away from a troubled relationship, whether it is a family or a church. It is built and made stronger by facing the problems, and doing what needs to be done to repair them. It may mean apologizing, forgiving or perhaps just setting

clearer boundaries. What God does not want us to do, because it is counterproductive, is to withdraw inwardly.

So why don't we go to the people who are disappointing us and say, "There's something I really need to talk with you about. I may have misunderstood, but our relationship means so much to me and I have to clear the air."

That scenario scares the living daylights out of most of us. It seems full of risk, and indeed it is. The other person might get mad at us. They might misunderstand what we are trying to do. If they do, there is a place where we can have our needs met—our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And like a once-broken bone, the relationship may actually become stronger.

We need to trust God with the pain and emptiness that can result from conflict and disappointment with people we expect to help us in times of test and trial. We can take the risk of telling God how empty we are and how much we would love to feel better. That doesn't mean we will feel better right away. But it does mean we've taken a step that will help us become more intimate with God, and as a result, maybe more intimate with the people who have disappointed us. If we can take the risk and be honest with these people, expecting nothing in return, God can work with that!

“ We need to trust God with the pain and emptiness that can result from conflict and disappointment with people we expect to help us in times of trial. ”

So, the next time you find yourself tempted to just "run away" because you feel offended and let down, ask yourself, "What do I really expect to happen and what do I really need?" Then ask this question: "Is there any human being that can completely meet and heal all of the physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological needs that I feel so deeply?"

No, there is not, although others can help. But there is God, who understands all of these needs before we even knew we had them. That is truly an intimacy that we can always rely on. And that relationship helps us put all the others in perspective. As the New Testament reminds us:

"If someone says, 'I love God,' but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen? And God himself has commanded that we must love not only him but our Christian brothers and sisters, too" (1 John 4:20-21, New Living Translation). •



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William Seymour and the Rise of Pentecostalism

By Paul Kroll

April 2006 was the 100th anniversary of a momentous revolution in Christianity that began at 312 Azusa Street in a ramshackle part of downtown Los Angeles. A writer for a local newspaper captured the significance of the Azusa Street Revival when he noted that it is “now seen as the great awakening of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement.”¹

The pastor at the Azusa Street church was William J. Seymour (1870-1922). Seymour, the son of former slaves, had been raised as a Baptist and later joined a radical Holiness church. There he came to believe in divine healing, the rapture of the saints and Premillennialism, justification by faith and “sanctification as a second work of grace.”²

Seymour had also been a follower of a Holiness preacher named Charles Fox Parham (1873-1929). He attended Parham’s Bible school in Houston, Texas, where he was taught the idea that tongues-speaking is the biblical evidence of being baptized in the Holy Spirit.

Seymour came to Los Angeles, where he was invited to minister to a house church on North Bonnie Brae Street. It was here that a defining event happened during a worship service on April 9, 1906. A member of the small group suddenly spoke in



belief that tongues-speaking was a sign that all the gifts of the Spirit had been restored to the church. A headline in the paper’s first issue (September 1906) proclaimed: “Pentecost Has Come. Los Angeles Being Visited by a Revival of Bible Salvation and Pentecost as Recorded in the Book of Acts.”³

The local revival sown on Azusa Street became the seed-bed of an international Christian movement. Over the next three years, the hundreds of people who first worshipped there, many speaking in tongues, revolutionized Christianity in several ways:

- During a time of rampant segregation and discrimination, the Azusa Street congregation was remarkably interracial. African-Americans, Anglos, Hispanics, and Christians of other ethnic backgrounds freely mingled, worshipped together and shared



“A member of the small group suddenly spoke in “tongues.” Then, in a chain reaction, others at Bonnie Brae also became tongues-speakers.”

“tongues.” Then, in a chain reaction, other members at Bonnie Brae also became tongues-speakers.

This led to much notoriety and a crush of new worshippers filling the small church. It forced Seymour to relocate his congregation to a larger building on Azusa Street in what is today the Little Tokyo section of Los Angeles. The new church was called the “Apostolic Faith Gospel Mission.” Here the revival grew into a crescendo as more and more people began to speak in tongues.

The Apostolic Faith, the Azusa Street congregation’s newspaper, trumpeted the group’s growing

leadership.

• A missionary fervor characterized the Azusa Street worshippers and those who had joined with them. Many members of the Azusa group streamed out across America and into other lands to preach the gospel. This evangelistic fervor would lead to a worldwide explosion in Pentecostalism.

• The Azusa Street revivalists possessed a deep-seated belief that *all* the supernatural gifts of the Spirit had been dispensed to believers so they could preach Christ’s gospel and build his church.

Speaking in tongues, faith healing, fervent

prayer, emotional, from-the-heart participatory worship and stress on evangelism became the hallmarks of the Azusa Street experience. These were the very traits that appealed to many Christians and seekers. Pentecostalism's influence began to be felt in non-Pentecostal churches and denominations. The Charismatic movement developed out of this worship and stress on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Today, the number of classical Pentecostals worldwide and those who are considered Pentecostal-like charismatics has exploded. Because of a fervent missionary zeal, it has become one of the fastest-growing Christian movements in South America and Africa. *The Dictionary*

of Christianity in America cites Pentecostalism as being "perhaps the single-most-significant development in twentieth-century Christianity."⁴

For the most part, Pentecostalism has been considered a movement of the poor and marginalized people of the world, and that has been true up to a point. However, it has also made dramatic inroads into mainstream and mainline Western Christianity with its charismatic appeal. Because of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement, all Christians have had to consider more deeply the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian and in Christian mission around the world. ●

1 Andrew Moyle, "A Century of Faith: Event Celebrates 100th Anniversary of Azusa Street Revival," *Downtown News*, April 24, 2006, page 7.
2 Frank Bartleman, *Azusa Street: The*

Roots of Modern-day Pentecost (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1980), Introduction, Vinson Synan, page ix.
3 "The Apostolic Faith," vol. 1, no. 1, Sept. 1906.

4 Roger G. Robins, "Pentecostal Movement," in *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Daniel G. Reid, ed.; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), page 885.

Speaking of Life...



with Joseph Tkach

Billy Graham has often used a phrase to encourage people to accept the redemption we have in Jesus. He says, "Come, just as you are!"

It is a reminder that God sees everything: our best and our worst, and he loves us anyway. The call to come "just as you are" is a reflection of the apostle Paul's words in Romans 5: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8).

Many people today don't even think in terms of sin. Our modern and postmodern generations tend to think more in terms of a sense of "emptiness," "hopelessness," or "meaninglessness," and often view their inner struggle as being rooted in a low sense of self-worth. They often try to learn to love themselves as a means of becoming loveable, but likely as not, they feel like they are so messed up, so broken, that they can never be well.

But God doesn't define us by our lacks and our failures; he sees our whole being: the good, the bad and the ugly, and he loves us dearly in spite of everything.

Even though God does not have a hard time loving us, we often have a hard time accepting his love. Deep inside, we know we aren't worthy of it.

In the 1500s, Martin Luther struggled mightily to live a morally perfect life, but continually found himself failing, and in his

frustration he at last discovered freedom in God's grace. Until then, Luther had identified himself with his sins—and found only despair—instead of identifying himself with Jesus, God's perfect and beloved Son, who took away the sins of the world, including those of Martin Luther.

In these modern times, even though many people don't tend to think in terms of sin, they nevertheless have feelings of hopelessness and doubt that create a deep-seated sense of being unlovable. What they need to know is that in spite of their emptiness, despite their worthlessness, God values them and loves them.

God loves you, too. Even though God hates sin, he does not hate you. God loves all people, even sinners, and he hates sin precisely because it hurts and destroys people.

"Come just as you are" means that God is not waiting for you to get better before you come to him. He loves you already, despite what you have done. He has secured a way out of anything and everything that could separate you from him. He has secured your escape from every prison of the human mind and heart.

What is it that holds you back from experiencing the joy of knowing God's love for you? Whatever it is, why not give that burden to Jesus, who is more than able to carry it for you? ●

This article is derived from Speaking of Life, a weekly video program presented by Joseph Tkach on the Worldwide Church of God website. You can watch it online, listen online, or download the video, audio, or text. For all these options, go to www.wcg.org/av/spol.htm.

The Purpose of Freedom

A study of Galatians 5

By Mike Morrison

Paul has vigorously argued that Christians are not enslaved to sin and not enslaved to law. How then do we live between these two errors?

Circumcision a mark of slavery (verses 1-6)

Paul begins chapter 5 with a bold slogan of spiritual liberty: **It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.** Christ lived, died, and was resurrected so that we might be free.

Judaizers were saying that Gentiles had to join the old covenant if they wanted God's blessings and salvation (cf. Acts 15:1, 5). In Galatians 3 and 4, Paul explains that this is false. If people submit to rules that have no authority, it would be like putting themselves into prison. In chapter 5, he exhorts them:

Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. Jews spoke favorably about "the yoke of the law," as if the law would be a harness that helped them work effectively. But Paul turns that image around, saying that if the people turn to the law, the yoke would be one of slavery, and the work would do them no good.

Stand firm in your freedom, he says, and don't be bullied by threats. We need not fear the day of judgment, because we are justified on the basis of faith, not works. We will always fall short when it comes to our works, but the gospel says that Christ has already done all the work we need.

If we turn to the law again, we would be saying that Christ was not enough. **Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all.** A physical procedure cannot thwart God's grace (see verse 6), but if it is done as a means of entering the old covenant, it shows that the person no longer trusts Christ to be a fully effective Savior.

Paul reminds them: **Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law.** The law is not merely burdensome—it is a guarantee of failure. The person who turns to law has turned away from Christ:

You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. The Judaizers wanted to add the law to

Christ, but these two cannot be combined. If we are trying to get right with God by obeying a law, we are no longer trusting in the grace of Christ.

Paul explains the Christian way: **But by faith we eagerly await through the Spirit the righteousness for which we hope.** God's Spirit assures us that God accepts us now, and will accept us on the day of judgment, because of Christ.

It does not matter whether we are Jewish or Gentile. **For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.** Here is something that counts—something important. It is not a means of earning salvation, but something that flows from salvation. Faith in Christ expresses itself in our behavior.

Obligation to love (verses 13-15)

Paul sums it up in verse 13: **You...were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.** The word for "serve" here is *douleō*, the verb form of *doulos*, or "slave." Do not be a slave of the sinful nature, nor a slave of the law—but *do* be a slave in your love for one another.

Christ does not give us freedom so we can live selfishly—that would be slavery to passions—but he allows us to live the way of heaven: love. That obligation still remains (see Romans 13:8). If we want the kind of life that God offers, we should want to live that way even now.

Paul tells us to love *because* (the NIV unfortunately omits that connecting word) **the entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."** To paraphrase Paul's logic: When we love one another we have done everything that the law requires.

In chapter 3, Paul argued that the law was temporary, with authority only until Christ came. Here, he writes as if the law should still be done. Paul is using the word "law" in two senses. Law, referring to the old covenant, was temporary, but law in the sense of obligation to God and fellow humans is permanent.

Regulations about fabrics, food, and festivals are obsolete. But love is a law that is valid forever, because it is the essence of God and his realm, and



that is what he wants us to share in for all eternity. The need for love did not end when the old covenant ended, because love was valid before the old covenant began. If any part of the old covenant can be said to survive, it is only because it expresses what was already true anyway.

Paul's opponents in Galatia were probably saying that grace is not a sufficient guide to life, that we need the law to help us resist sin. Paul responds by saying that the solution to sin-slavery is not law-slavery—it is being enslaved to one another in love. If we do that, we are doing what the law required all along.

But what was happening in Galatia instead? They were bickering about fleshly rituals like circumcision, comparing themselves with each other to see who was the most scrupulous about things that really didn't matter. So Paul warns them, **If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.** An obsession with the details of the law does not come from love.

Life by the Spirit (verses 16-24)

Paul says more about how God's Spirit (not the law) is the answer to the problem of sin: **So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.** When we are led by the Spirit, our lives change. We don't just "do whatever comes naturally"—we will put to death the habits that hurt other people.

This is often difficult: **For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.** We should serve one another in love, not serve ourselves in selfishness.

The Spirit is opposed to our sinful desires—but it is also opposed to the law. They are mutually incompatible: **But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.** Our allegiance is to the Spirit, not the law. The Spirit will lead us into acts of service and love, not into old covenant rituals.

Paul mentions some of the negative results of selfishness: **The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual**

immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft... Those are obviously wrong.

Then Paul mentions a few sins—probably including a few things that the Galatians were currently experiencing in their doctrinal controversy: **hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy.** He ends with a few more "obvious" sins: **drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.** People whose lives are filled with selfishness do not even *want* to be in a kingdom that is filled with love.

In contrast, **the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.**

The law does not deal with most of these things—but the Spirit does. When we are led by God, we go beyond what the law required. People who are fixated on the old covenant have set their sights too low.

The law is not the solution to sin. Jesus Christ is. We need him not only for mercy on the day of judgment, but for living the new life we have in this age. **Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.** In Christ, we have put those ways behind us and now we follow the Spirit in the ways of love. ●

Questions for discussion

- Christ is the Savior of all people, even those who don't believe (1 Timothy 4:10). So how could Christ be "of no value"? (v. 2)
- How does faith produce acts of love? (v. 6)
- Does Christian freedom mean that Christians are free to indulge their sinful nature? (v. 14)
- When we are led by the Spirit, how do we tell the difference between what we want and what the Spirit wants? (v. 17)
- Can we crucify our own desires and still remain the same person? (v. 24)

The Greeks had a Word for it

"Sarx"

The Greek word *sarx*, traditionally translated "flesh," is often rendered as "sinful nature" in the NIV. That is because Paul sometimes uses the word to refer to evil inclinations, not just bodily appetites and physical desires. In listing "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:19-21, Paul includes mental sins and social rivalries as well as more fleshly sins such as sexual immorality.

Sometimes Paul seems to use the word as an alien power that

we must fight against. "You are controlled not by the *sarx* but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you" (Romans 8:9).

The word *sarx* had a double meaning when Paul argued with Judaizers. In their focus on circumcision, they were worried about the flesh. Paul says that Christianity is focused on the Spirit, not the flesh. ●

Hmm...

Jesus, I believe, saw that his contemporaries were stuck in their own suicidal system, driven by their own defective framing story. He proposed a radical alternative—a profoundly new framing story that he called good news. News, of course, means a story—a story of something that has happened or is happening that you should know about. Good news, then, would mean a story that you should know about because it brings hope, healing, joy, and opportunity. Jesus was saying, in essence, “There are a lot of bad stories in our world. But I have a good story that frames the bad ones, that puts them in a new light, that says they aren’t the last word. I have a good story that offers the opportunity for healing and transformative action in our world.”

Brian McLaren

Everything Must Change, p. 79

Now Peacemaking is a divine work. For peace means reconciliation and God is the author of peace and of reconciliation.... It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the particular blessing which attaches to peacemakers is that “they shall be called sons of God.” For they are seeking to do what their Father has done, loving people with his love.

John R. W. Stott

The Message of the Sermon on the Mount

No man knows how bad he is till he had tried very hard to be good.

C. S. Lewis

Mere Christianity

If a man hasn’t discovered something he will die for, he isn’t fit to live.

Martin Luther King Jr.

It cannot be said too often that in the New Testament, the opposite of sin is not virtue, it is faith.

Robert Farrar Capon

The Parables of Judgment

Without systematic and purposeful abandonment, an organization will be overtaken by events. It will squander its best resources on things it should never have been doing or should no longer do. As a result, it will lack the resources, especially capable people, needed to exploit the opportunities that arise. Far too few businesses are willing to slough off yesterday, and as a result, far too few have resources available for tomorrow.

Peter Drucker

There is sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are messengers of overwhelming grief... and unspeakable love.

Robert Browning

If you want happiness for an hour, take a nap. If you want happiness for a day, go fishing. If you want happiness for a year, inherit a fortune. If you want happiness for a lifetime, help somebody.

Chinese proverb

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