

good news

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| Choices |

How to Forgive when it seems Impossible |

Jesus Only

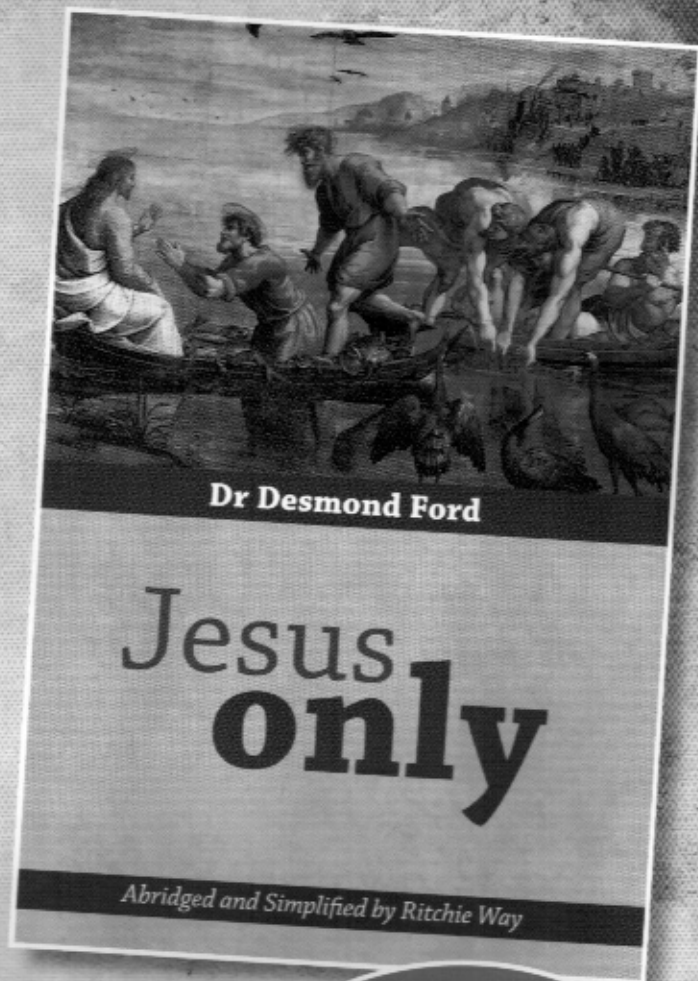
by Desmond Ford (Author)
Ritchie Way (Editor)

'He saw no man but Jesus only.'
Matthew 17:8

HIS book is Christ-centred, Cross-centred, and gospel-centred. It focuses on the fulfilment of a promise that God made well over three thousand years ago. God promised that one day he would dwell with us and walk with us, and he would be our God and we would be his people.

That promise was fulfilled in Jesus, who was 'God with us'. Jesus came to show us what God is like. He took our sins upon himself, and on the Cross he was judged and condemned for them so that we could be free of condemnation. That's what God is like.

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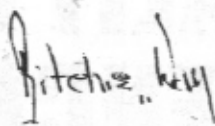
Editorial

The word 'gospel' is made up of two Greek words *eu* and *angelion*. The first word *eu* means good. It is used to start a number of words such as eulogy (a good word), and euthanasia (a good death). The word *euangelion* means a good message or good news. The proclaimer of good news was called an evangelist, i.e. a good-newsist (Acts 21:8; 8:5).

So what is this news? And why is it good? The news is that the kingdom of God has come.

God's people had waited for centuries for the promised kingdom that one of King David's offspring would set up, a kingdom that would deliver them from the oppressor (Psa. 89:34-36). Then came Jesus, the Son of David, announcing, 'The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news' (Mark 1:14-15).

The kingdoms of this world belonged to Satan (Luke 4:5-6); they gave their allegiance to him. But now Jesus had come to Planet Earth and planted his flag here. The time had arrived for the Son of David (Matt. 1:1) to set up his kingdom here in opposition to the kingdoms of this world. It would start small, like a rock, but it would grow into a mountain that would fill the whole earth.



RITCHIE WAY



What did Jesus do to establish his kingdom here? Did he go forth, at the head of an angel army to slay the opposition? Did he compel his enemies with whips and threats of execution to come and bow low at his feet?

Jesus did none of these things to achieve his goal. His kingdom would not be established on the broken bodies and shed blood of Israel's enemies, but on the broken body and shed blood of Israel's King. Christ would not sacrifice his enemies to build his kingdom; he would sacrifice himself.

Jesus was not interested in an earthly kingdom populated by unconverted and self-serving citizens, which is why he turned down Satan's offer at the beginning of his ministry (Luke 4:5-8). So-called Messiahs would try the earthly model many times, but every time they

would fail to produce the promised utopia.

The key to the nature of the citizens of God's kingdom is found in the nature of its King. If Jesus were a man just like David his kingdom would be just like David's. But Jesus was much more than just a 'son of David'; he was also the 'Son of God.' As to his human nature he was from David, but as to his divine nature he was from God. Jesus was the God-Man, the perfect union of God and man. And the citizens of his kingdom, likewise, would be only those who were a union of the human and the divine. Every citizen of his kingdom would be a dwelling place for Christ's Spirit (Eph. 3:14-17), and there would not be a single citizen in his kingdom that wasn't (Rom. 8:9; 2 Cor. 13:5).

The French emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte, commiserated, 'The more I study the world, the more I am convinced of the inability of brute force to create anything durable.' By contrast, the eternal kingdom that Jesus planted here on earth is made up only of those who have freely chosen to have the immortal Lord dwelling in them (Col. 1:27). And where the Lord is, death cannot reign, which is why the citizens of Christ's kingdom have eternal life, and why his kingdom, unlike Napoleon's, 'will never end' (Luke 1:33). ✽

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Christians united in offering to all meaning and direction in their lives through a knowledge of God's reconciliation with humanity through his Son, Jesus Christ.



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THE MORAL INFLUENCE THEORY

PART II

THE IMMORALITY OF THE MORAL INFLUENCE THEORY

Introduction

In the first part of this series on the Moral Influence Theory we explored some of the reasons why the Moral Influence Theory appeals to many people. In that article, we started to see some of the problems with this theory. Now we will go to the heart of the issues.¹

When is a gospel not a gospel? What I mean is, the gospel exists to address a particular problem, through a particular method, in order to provide a particular result. The Moral Influence Theory falls down against each of these criteria.

An analogy is eating. Can you eat without being nourished? Can you spend your money for food that harms you more than it builds you up? Of course you can! We call it junk food. Junk food cheats you; you feel full but you haven't really eaten. It isn't the real thing. You felt hunger because your body needed nutrients; it needed life but you have simply satisfied the hunger without giving your body what it was really craving.

In the same way, if the Moral Influence Theory talks about the gospel at all, it only offers a 'Junk-Food' gospel. This is a gospel that may make you feel good for a while, but it cannot offer you what you most need, which is salvation in Jesus Christ.

Here then are the three reasons why the Moral Influence Theory is immoral:

1. It doesn't recognise the problem

The gospel exists to deal with a problem. What is that problem? Most Christians would agree that it is the problem of sin.

The basic Biblical definition of sin is that 'sin is lawlessness' (NIV). It is when we try to understand what constitutes that 'lawlessness' that theologians give us variations in the understanding of what sin is. Even if you are a Christian who believes that the ten-commandment law has been abolished, you will still believe in the 'law of Christ' (Gal 6:2) or the 'law of love' (Matt 22:34-40). So the problem is always sin—a broken law.

ELIEZER GONZALEZ, PhD

The Moral Influence Theory is generally strangely quiet about the topic of sin; the word isn't mentioned much; neither is the law. This is because the Moral Influence Theory does not recognise sin as the problem—at least not in a biblical way. The reason is that the biblical notions of sin and a broken law require a sacrifice, and this is something that the Moral Influence Theory will not accept.

Instead, the Moral Influence Theory redefines the problem to suit itself. Instead of talking about a 'broken law', or even about sin all that much, the Moral Influence Theory talks a lot about selfishness and the lack of love as being the problem. Of course, who can disagree with this?

The problem with the Moral Influence Theory is not what it does say, but what it does *not* say. Of course selfishness and the lack of love are the problem. But how does

the Scripture define love? Jesus says that love is the summary and cornerstone of *all* of the law (Matt 22:40), and for that reason, love is demonstrated by the keeping of his commands (John 14:15). Scripture never defines love and unselfishness apart from the law, but that is what the Moral Influence Theory tries to do.

The Bible gives an objective, not a subjective reason for why we need salvation. The reason is because of the condemning and enslaving power of sin. Sin is not a feeling; it is not merely an emotional concept. Sin is a reality that causes devastation in this world and in our lives. We are sinners, and that is our legal status, because sin is defined objectively in Scripture.

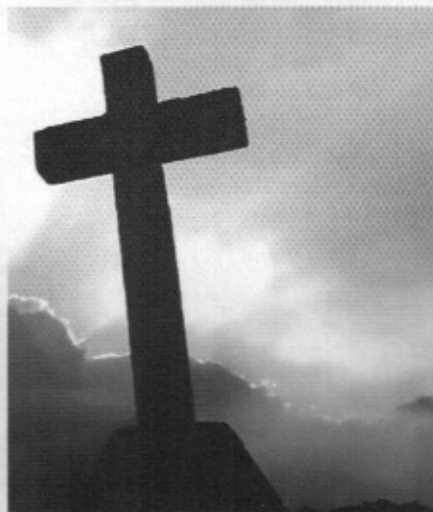
Sin exists because of an assessment made against a standard, and that standard is the law. Sin is an objective reality and sin has consequences.

For those who believe the Moral Influence Theory, sin becomes cheapened. This view in essence says that sin has no moral consequences. Sin may have negative effects in the natural world and in human life, but in reality there is no guilt that needs to be dealt with in a real, legal sense. For people who teach the Moral Influence Theory, guilt is merely that bad feeling you get because you have sinned, that you just have to 'get over' once you realise how much God loves you.

But what happens when you remove the biblical concept of sin from the gospel? Instead of being 'good news,' the gospel just becomes 'confusing news.' Why have a solution if the problem doesn't exist? In fact, why have a gospel at all?

2. It doesn't have a method for addressing the problem

The Moral Influence Theory tells us that the Cross was merely a demonstration of the love of God; and that it was not a sacrifice in the usual sense of the word. A sacrifice implies a transaction of some kind. This is the normal idea behind the concept of sacrifice, and it is in this sense



that the word 'sacrifice' is always used in the Bible. However, the proponents of the Moral Influence Theory would suggest that Calvary is only a 'sacrifice' in the sense that Jesus threw His life away; in other words, it was only a demonstration, not a transaction. Jesus obtained nothing from what He did at Calvary except that he secured some 'bargaining chips' with humanity in terms of how much He loves them. But this is not how the writers of Scripture understand Calvary at all; instead, Jesus truly died for our sins (Gal. 1:4; Heb. 9:15; 1 Pet. 3:18).

The reason why the Moral Influence Theory refuses to see Calvary as a real sacrifice is because it refuses to see that Calvary has a legal basis. In this way, the Moral Influence Theory divorces sin from its penalty and its consequences and it pretends that the problem of sin cannot somehow be solved without addressing its penalty or its consequences. This is, of course, a very attractive proposition for human beings, because it says that somehow there can be salvation without really dealing with the issue of sin; that there can be salvation without the Cross of Jesus.

According to this theory, the Cross was optional for God. If that is the case, then it must surely also be optional for us. Most of the biblical words used with reference to what happened through the Cross of Jesus are now meaningless, since they have legal, transactional, and sacrificial meanings—words like 'redemption,' 'atonement,' 'justification,' 'righteousness.' In less time than it takes to say, 'Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb,' the biblical language of salvation disappears into oblivion, and goes off to join that problematic word 'sin' that started it all.

How different this is to the Biblical understanding of the Cross of Jesus; that the death of Jesus was not merely some foolish, extravagant, emotional, and optional gesture on the part of God, but rather the essential bedrock of our salvation! (Rom. 5:9–11, 18–21; Eph. 1:7; 5:2; Col. 1:19–22; Heb. 9: 9:26–28; 1 Pet. 2:24; 1 John 2:2; 4:10; Rev. 1:6; 7:14). By removing the Cross from the foundation and centre of salvation, the Moral Influence Theory leaves us without a method for addressing the fundamental human problem of sin. It assumes that by somehow simply seeing how much God loves us, we all have it within us to come to God; it assumes that forgiveness of sin has no objective basis at all; but that God simply forgives (or does not forgive) on a whim.

3. Hey Presto! Abracadabra...the Vanishing Gospel

Because the Moral Influence Theory doesn't recognise the problem it doesn't have a way of addressing the problem!

The Moral Influence Theory therefore effectively provides no solution to the fundamental problem of the human condition. The gospel has effectively vanished in a puff of words about love.

Let's remind ourselves of what the Bible tells us that the gospel is. Paul writes,

'For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed—a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous [person] will live by faith"' (Rom 1:17, NIV).

The word 'righteous' is a legal term; it is all about law; it is all about being moral. The gospel is the good news about the legal status of righteousness that we are granted by faith. And to show you how important this gospel is, it is not only the announcement of God's righteousness for all who have faith, but in Romans 2:16 Paul tells us that all things will be judged according to this very gospel. In terms of salvation, it is the gold standard of everything true and false. So we must judge the Moral Influence Theory according to the gospel that Paul preached as well.

So what does Paul's gospel look like? He writes in 1 Corinthians 15:1–4:

'Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...'

And now the clincher in Paul's argument:

'God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished' (Rom. 3:25).

Those who speak or write on the Moral Influence Theory don't much like to cite any of biblical passages that I have cited in this article, because they are all completely foreign to what they are trying to teach.

The gospel does not start from the premise that we simply need to be informed; instead it starts from the premise that each one of us is a sinner who is entirely and legally condemned to eternal death.

The gospel is not in essence an announcement about what God is like; instead it is essentially an announcement of the perfect atonement that God has

provided through Jesus Christ. The gospel is specifically about what God has done through the death and resurrection of Christ.

The gospel in essence does not lay out for us an example of love which we should be impressed by, and emulate; instead it invites us to accept by faith what Christ already done as the **only thing** which we can and must do in order to be saved.

4. Is God a Mentally-ill Immoral Monster?

Is God a mentally-ill immoral monster? Is He a schizophrenic who cannot perfectly balance justice and love? Is He a God who abandons righteousness for the sake of love, law for the sake of mercy, and morality for the sake of grace? Since God is love, do we abandon righteousness? Do we abandon the law? Do we abandon the sacrifice of Christ? Do we abandon His atonement for our sins?

Paul's answer would have been, 'Never! May these thoughts perish!' It is at the Cross, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that the words of the Psalmist are shown to be true, that 'Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other' (Psa. 85:10). It is that simple. We dare neither add to nor detract from His chosen method to save our souls.

Don't be fooled by those who peddle the Moral Influence Theory, no matter how much they may talk about the love of God, and even about the Cross. Don't be fooled by their talk about wanting to protect the reputation of God, because God's reputation is staked on Jesus going to the Cross, for without the Cross there can be no salvation.

The Moral Influence Theory is, in the most literal sense of the phrase, 'morally bankrupt.' God warns us through Paul about 'other' gospels in Galatians 1:8. He uses strong language. Too harsh? Perhaps I should have ended this article in a nicer tone? However, I must be faithful to Scripture. Paul used strong words lest the sacrifice of Jesus be in vain.

And so must I. ❄

In part 3 of this series, I will answer an important and fundamental question that is often asked by the proponents of the Moral Influence Theory: 'Did God Save You By Murdering His Own Son?'

ENDNOTES

1. I recognise that there is variation of opinions within the Moral Influence Theory itself, so that the comments that follow should be seen necessarily as generalisations. Furthermore, I have no wish to impugn the genuineness of individuals who espouse the Moral Influence Theory, their love for God, or the genuineness of their salvation. These matters belong to a far better Judge than I.

Choices

Dr DESMOND FORD

THERE'S ONE thing you can be quite sure about: everyone in this wide world wants to be loved. People-haters are those who think they are ugly because they feel unloved. This means that we can change the world by love, minds can be changed, attitudes transformed, and people made new. There's a little bit of God in all love. The more we have of him, the more we have of it. Whether your world looks sour or sweet to you, depends on whether you've discovered this secret.

Our world is a triangle—we have a relationship with ourselves, with others, and with our Maker. But note it well—until we believe our Maker accepts us, we cannot accept ourselves; and until we accept ourselves, we cannot accept others. And more, those who cannot forgive are those who have never been forgiven. Those who cannot love others are the ones who have not accepted love. The person ever critical is the person insecure, lonely and lost. But there's no need for them to stay that way. The greatest sentence in the world of literature says, 'God so loved the world.' Is that where you live?

The hardest thing in the world to do is to forgive. Forgiveness means taking the cost, the penalty, accepting the consequences of someone else's wrongdoing. That's hard! That's tough! No evil can ever be undone, and revenge doesn't undo it; it just puts

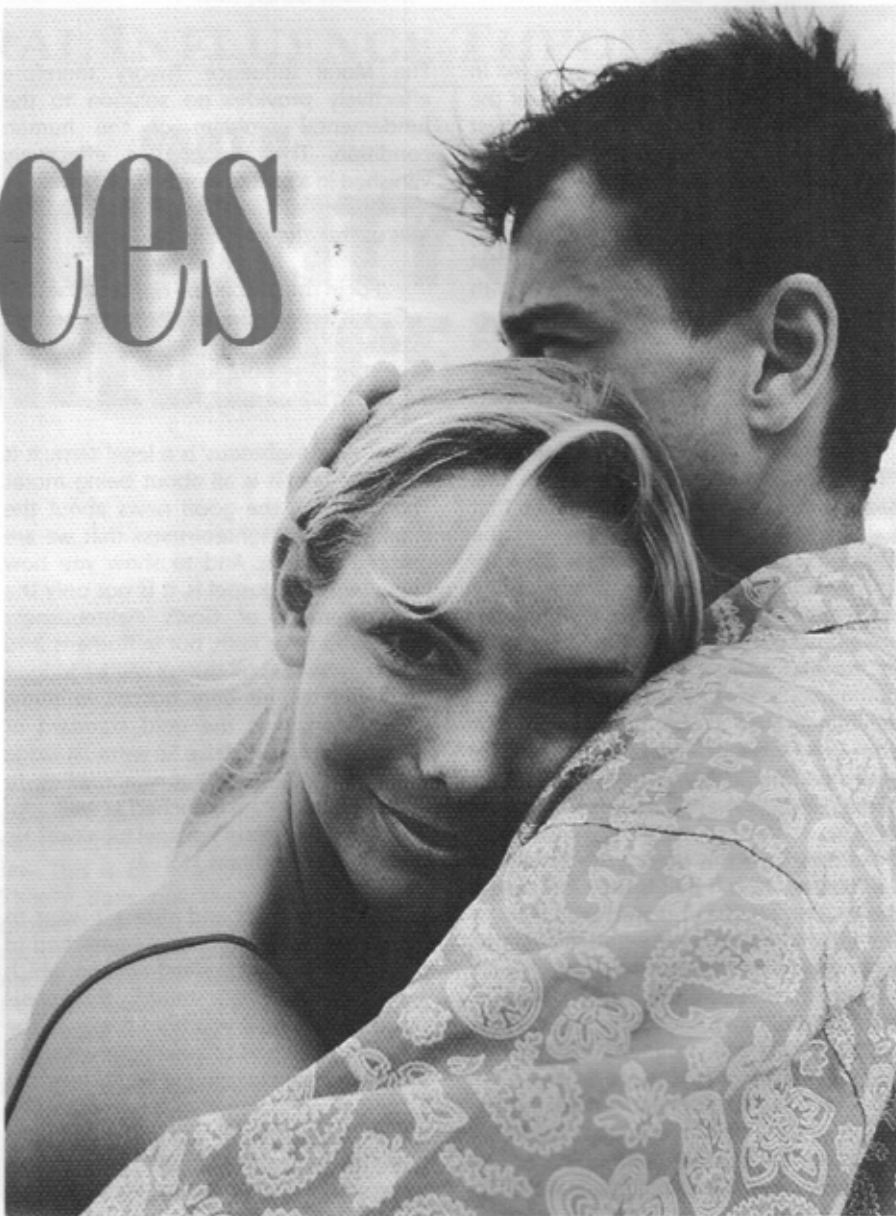
us on their level. But forgiveness raises us above them. Why should we forgive? He or she who won't forgive destroys the bridge over which they themselves must pass into eternal life. The best book in the world says, 'Forgive one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you.'

Many more people kill themselves than kill others. Most suicides are white rather than coloured, rich rather than poor, educated rather than unschooled, Protestant rather than Catholic. Ten times more people try to suicide than actually succeed. And teenage suicide has quadrupled in the last fifteen years. Why? The death of hope leads to the hope for death. But those who read the Good Book know that now abideth faith, hope, and love. There's always hope because God is for us, not against us, and if we believe that we know that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Many decisions you don't have to make: the nature of life for instance, or who made the first wheel. But it's different with moral issues; you just have to decide between lying and telling the truth, between purity and fornication. Life commits us. There can be no dodging here. What does that tell us about life? Could it be that moral issues are the real issues after all? Could it be that this is what all the great religions of the world have been trying to tell us?

Do you know why you are here? And what you are supposed to achieve? Have you ever heard of the two great commandments, supreme love to God, and to love one's neighbour as one's self? Could it be that life is a school, teaching us just that? Try reading the New Testament in a modern version and after that you will see life differently, purposefully, optimistically, joyously.

In every area of life we have axioms. For example, beauty is better than ugliness,



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and truth than falsehood. We know these things but we can't prove them. How can you prove you aren't dreaming right at this moment? Don't be surprised, therefore, if the deepest truths of existence are known intuitively rather than proved.

The pin-prick as well as the cancer, the trivial rebuff or the crushing blow—all pains, all frustrations, all sorrows and privations, however trivial, however great, can be accepted and changed into occasions of gratitude and peace. Each and every case of vexation, failure and suffering can be offered humbly to God because he is the crucified one, as well as the crowned. You see there are two handles to everything and all depends on which handle you take hold of a thing. Experience isn't what happens to you — it's what you do with what happens to you.

What a funny statement for a man to make, but there it is—Christ weeps over Jerusalem and says, 'How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her chickens, but you would not.' A strange statement indeed. What man would ever liken himself to a hen? A woman might. She knows that the hen is the most motherly of all creatures. A hen depends on her motherly call. She never picks up her young in her mouth as dogs or cats do. Mother-love is the nearest thing to divine love our world affords. That's why only one man could claim such a love without sounding silly.

The moral distance between a sea-slug on the ocean's bed and a man dreaming moral conquest is infinite. But why should it be so? You've heard of the second law of thermodynamics: everything left to itself becomes more and more random, like a bachelor's kitchen or an unkempt garden. Why is it that everything in the universe hasn't already run down? Hasn't eternity been long enough? Or if we deny there has been an eternity, we're saying someone wound up the universe in the first place. And if you are run down he can wind you up also today, for you are of more value than many sea-slugs.

We use our minds as we use windows, never stopping to think about them, or asking why they serve us so well. But if the mind is the result of an accidental grouping of atoms, why should we trust its conclusions? Aren't they just as random? Yet we do trust our minds. We do it even when we deny the universe is anything other than an accident. But if the mind is no accident, what about this universe? And what about you and me?

Did you know that the word *bigot*, b-i-g-o-t, is a condensation of the words—by God? Have you ever thought about it? The very best things easily can become the worst. Lilies fester worse than weeds. Sex, politics, religion, all intended to be the source of much good, can become the source of terrible sorrow. How can we tell true religion from false religion? True religion consists of faith, hope and love. False religion makes a world of an atom and an atom of a world.

H.G. Wells once wrote that race prejudice, justifies and holds together more baseness, cruelty and abomination than any other sort of error in the world. Surely those who profess religion should share an unprejudiced goodwill, for they see all men and women as equally children of God and treat them all without bias or discrimination. That man was right who said, 'The greatest thing a man can do for his Heavenly Father is to love his other children.'

Any religion that's gloomy, that's melancholy, that's dismal, just isn't Christian. Christ himself has often been misrepresented. Listen to his words, 'Fear not.' 'Be not anxious.' 'Be of good cheer.' 'I have come that you might have life and that you might have it more abundantly.' 'These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might be in you and that your joy might be made full.' Joy—that's a mark of true religion.

Who hasn't heard of Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. Not everybody knows that he was very unhappy in his atheism, haunted by anxiety about death and the meaninglessness of life. He spoke of this senseless life. What a great distance from Paul, who in prison, could write a cheerful letter to his friend saying, 'rejoice in the Lord always. And again I will say, rejoice.'

You know the greatest school in the world? The home. And the teachers? Of course, the parents. The mother represents the unconditional love of God. She loves her child regardless—even if he goes to the electric chair she loves him unconditionally. But the father represents conditional love. He represents the world out there, the world that's hard and tough and demands results. If a child has a good mother but not a good father they may lack discipline. They may never succeed. If a child has a good father but not a good mother, they may lack security and be over-rigorous in their life. We need good mothers and we need good fathers.

A good life is not simple, especially if one has done something that makes a long, uphill climb necessary. It was Harry Emerson Fosdick who said, 'I have seen many magnificent comebacks from moral abysses, alcoholism, vice, criminality, or what you will, but I never saw one that did not involve a recovery of a faith in God. My friends, have you seen one? The good news of the New Testament is that like clocks, men and women can become very run down and yet can be wound up again. The New Testament says, 'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature.'

When one writer wanted to write a book about worry, he went to a large library and looked up the card index. He found that under worms there were 189 titles listed, but only 22 books listed under worry. Almost 9 times as many books about worms as about worry. That's an example of how we reverse the importance of things in the twentieth century. The best book in the world about worry and against worry is the Scripture, what we call the Bible. Take for example the words of our Lord, 'Don't worry about tomorrow because tomorrow has got enough worries of its own.'

Said Robbie Louis Stevenson, 'Anyone can carry his burden, however hard, until nightfall. Anyone can do his work, however hard, for one day. Anyone can live sweetly, patiently, lovingly, purely, until the sun goes down.' And this is

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all that life really means.

There are many different kinds of arthritis and many different causes, but according to Dr. Russell Cecil, of the Cornell University Medical School, four of the commonest conditions that bring on arthritis are these: marital shipwreck, financial disaster, loneliness, and long-cherished resentments. Perhaps that's why one physician had a plaque on his wall that said this: THE MOST RELAXING-RECREATING FORCES ARE A HEALTHY RELIGION, SLEEP, MUSIC, AND LAUGHTER. Have faith in God. Learn to sleep well. Love good music. See the funny side of life. And health and happiness will be yours.

In industrialised countries more people commit suicide each year than die from the five most common communicable diseases. Twenty times as many doctors as manual labourers die from heart failure, for they lead tense lives and they pay the penalty. William James declared that, 'The Lord may forgive our sins, but the nervous system never does.' And one of our great sins is worry, unnecessary fear. Is there an answer? Yes, my friends. In Holy Writ there are about 365 'fear nots'—one for every day of the year. The whole book is full of the same message—'The Lord is my shepherd, therefore I shall not want.' Read and believe.

Every time I stew over my troubles I'm paying interest on them. I need to remember what William James said, 'Be willing to have it so, acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune.' John Milton declared, 'It's not miserable to be blind. It's only miserable not to be able to endure blindness.' In view of those

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things my friends, think on the prayer: 'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.'

For most of us nine-tenths of our life is good and one-tenth evil. We can become miserable if we focus on the one-tenth, or joyous if we focus on the nine-tenths. In many of the old churches in England you see inscribed the phrase, Think and Thank. What would you sell your eyes for? Or your legs? Or your hands? Or your children? My friends—think and thank.

During the great depression there was a night in the life of J. C. Penney, of Penney's

Stores, when he did not expect to live to see the dawn. He was given a sedative. To his surprise he awoke and went downstairs to the little chapel of the Battlecreek Sanitarium and they were singing a hymn, 'God will take care of You.' He listened with a weary heart to the singing. 'Suddenly' he said, 'Something happened.' 'I can only call it a miracle. I felt I had been instantly lifted out of a darkness of a dungeon into warm, brilliant sunlight. I felt as if I had been transported from hell to paradise. I realised then that I alone was responsible for all of my troubles. I knew that God, with his love, was there to help me. From that day to this, my life has been free from worry.' 'Yes, God will take care of you if you let him.'

In the early days of flying, one pilot, not long after he had taken off, heard a fearful sound of nibbling in his cockpit. He guessed that a rat had joined aboard at the last stop and might soon destroy him. Then he remembered that rats were made for low altitudes only, as they burrowed in the earth. And so he flew higher and higher until the nibbling ceased. At the next airfield he found that rat quite dead. My friends, is something nibbling at your life destructively? Try a higher altitude. Try the altitude of faith, hope and love. It will kill off the rats.

We are anxious about what people think of us, but the truth is they think very little about us at all. A slight headache to most people is far more important to them than you. Perhaps that's why Christ warned us, 'How can you believe who receive honour from each other and seek not the honour that comes from God only.'

My friends, let us love each other but not fear each other. ❄

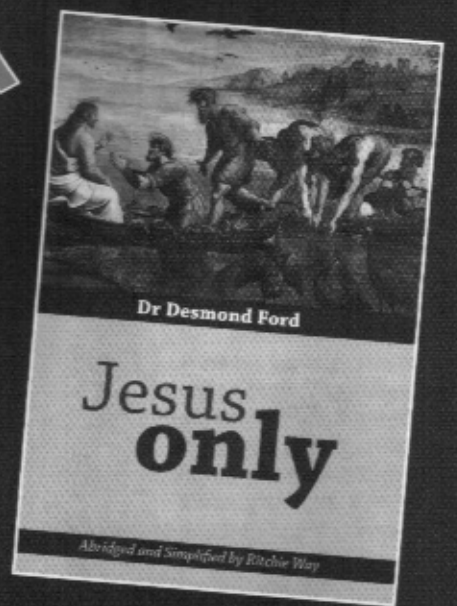
BOOKS FOR AFRICA APPEAL - UPDATE

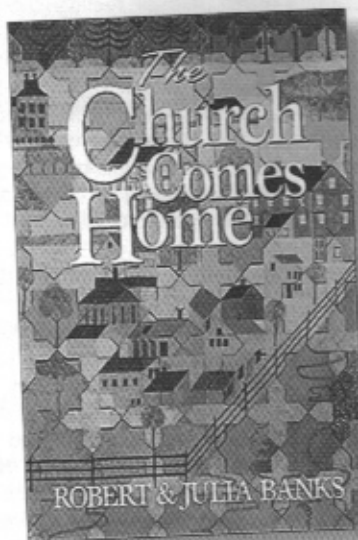
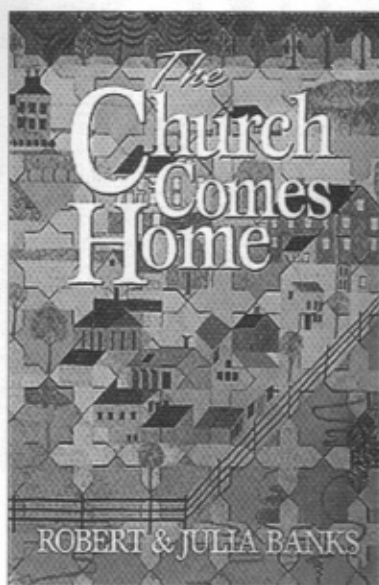
At the time of writing, I can report that God has wonderfully blessed us, since we have received gifts of over \$27,000 for this appeal.

Right now I am negotiating with publishers to find the most cost-effective combination of languages and numbers of books for printing.

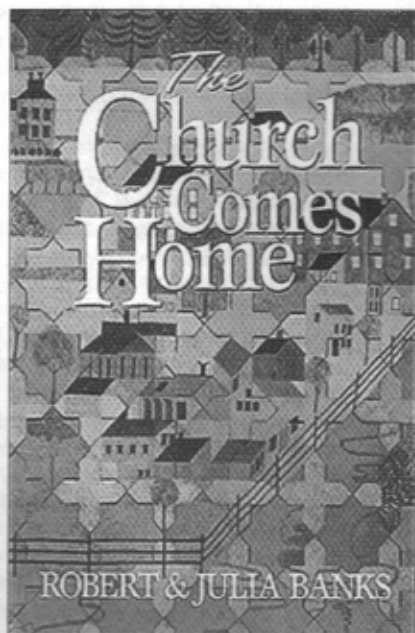
Meanwhile, our brothers and sisters in Africa are waiting anxiously for this book to be published in their own languages. Hopefully it will not be too long before we have them in their hands, thanks to your love of the gospel! Thank you! We will keep you informed of progress with this project, and of the changed lives that will result.

Grace and Peace in Jesus!
Eliezer Gonzalez





PAPERBACK



The Church Comes Home

**ROBERT &
JULIA BANKS**

IN OUR modern dislocated society many are searching for a church experience that offers true Christian sharing, nurturing and discipleship, in addition to teaching and worship. For many such people the answer is found in the home-church—a small committed group of often diverse people who meet together in homes to pray, sing, study and share their lives.

The Church Comes Home is both visionary and practical. It describes how home churches can be formed, how they should grow, and how networks of home churches can develop. It examines issues, eg., how to make decisions, how to discuss doctrine, how to include children, singles, elders, and how to reach out to the community at large, offering practical suggestions for their resolution.

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How to **Forgive** when it seems **Impossible**

SMUTS VAN ROOYEN

IT'S HARD TO FORGIVE—very hard. When someone else makes a decision that significantly alters the course of your life, it is hard to forgive. When an act against you is so humiliating that you question yourself and lose your courage, it's hard to forgive.

Put yourself in the place of the deserted mother, the physically abused teenager, the farmer driven off his land, the fired university president who is now delivering milk, and you will agree—forgiving is not easy. Well, if it is so hard to forgive, why bother? What difference does forgiveness make?

Forgiving releases us from the control of those who hurt us. It enables us to stop reacting to our injuries and to get on with productive living. Forgiveness pulls us out of the pit of anger and depression. It restores hope for the future. Forgiveness gives someone else a break. Above all, it reaffirms the meaning of the death of Jesus who died to make forgiveness possible.

What Forgiveness Is

Before going any further, we should define what forgiveness is. Forgiveness is not simply amnesia or forgetfulness. To pretend that something very painful did not happen is usually dishonest and always dangerous. Forgiveness is not a kind of blocking out but a kind of letting go.

Some of us don't block out, but we downgrade the significance of what happened. 'Oh, it is not really that bad,' we say. But often it really is that bad. Recently, a mother, whose addicted son frequently lied to her, stole from her, and threatened her with a knife, said to me, 'He's only going over fools' hill like all teenagers do!' Self-deception is not forgiveness.

Martyrdom often masquerades, as forgiveness. One need only think of the tolerant husband whose sole function in life is to be the family punching bag. His wife and children emotionally abuse him. Everybody picks on him, blames him, humiliates him, but he just hangs in there, taking it all like a good martyr. In truth, he is not being Christian but being sick. A true martyr is a witness, not a wimp. To suffer for your beliefs is not the same as suffering for your non-assertiveness.

What is forgiveness? In the New Testament there are two main verbs that are used for forgiving. The first, *charizomai*, means 'to deal graciously with.' In other words you do not see that justice is done; instead you give the gift of mercy. The second is *aphiemi*, which means 'to send away' or 'to loose.' In other words, you do not keep the person in bondage to you but let him go free.

Forgiveness is a form of giving. You give up a grudge, give a gift of freedom, surrender up a hurt.

How to Forgive—Accept Pain

This brings us to the central question—How do I forgive another person? There is no forgiveness without pain. When someone has shot an arrow into you, expect the extraction to be excruciating. To hurt here is normal and healthy. Allow yourself to feel the pain, then turn it over to God. This is the example of the cross.

The Christ that forgives us on Calvary is not the Christ of the stiff upper lip—the stuff-your-feelings Christ: Our forgiveness is accomplished by a Saviour who faces the awful task of feeling the emotional pain inflicted on him. He weeps in pain over Jerusalem which rejects him, sweats blood when his beloved disciples fail him, and is inundated by such an oppressive loneliness that he cries out, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'

Forgiveness should hurt because it is

unnatural to absorb a wrong. Those who shut out their feelings find it difficult to forgive in the long run, because emotions treated in this fashion continue to have an insidious effect. Suppressed emotion is a poison that relentlessly attacks the spiritual system. Negative emotions must be dealt with. This is done by facing them, feeling them, growing in their pain, and then giving them to God.

Don't Get Stuck in Justice

'When someone has hurt you deeply, it is almost impossible to refrain from rehashing how wrong 'they' are. Your sense of justice takes over and dominates your thinking. You are obsessed with the bitter issue—who is to blame? Now this is not all bad. After all, someone or something is responsible when someone is crushed. We live in a moral world of law, of cause and effect, which makes it necessary to determine responsibility. In fact, we could never forgive if we did not determine who is in the wrong. This must be done, because forgiveness is only for those who are in fact guilty.

When Jesus forgave the woman caught in adultery, Zacchaeus the cheat, and the criminal on the cross, the accusations brought against these sinners were all true. Wrongdoers need forgiveness, not the innocent. So use your sense of justice—but don't get stuck in it.

If you get bogged down in justice, you will always be an accuser and never a forgiver. Forgiveness is the willingness to absorb what is really wrong. But this absorption can never happen while you hold to a strict, letter-of-the-law, to-the-last-penny sense of justice. Forgiveness happens only when there is mercy as well as justice.

Forgiveness happens only when you are willing to permit an incorrect settlement of the account (see Psa. 130:4). So let compassion break in. Adjust your sense of justice.



At Calvary God did not let justice destroy us. He found a merciful alternative for the exercise of his justice and let us live. He turned the control knob of justice from its 'I'm-keeping-the-score' setting to the 'It's-right-to-show-mercy' setting. Here music plays.

Reaffirm the Worth of People

Sometimes an injury is so devastating, so agonizing, that even love is turned into revulsion. Where once there was respect, now there is a horrible disgust. This happens because pain prods us to devalue, even to dehumanise those who do us harm. How do I forgive? The way out of this bitter stance is to reaffirm the worth of people, all people, even 'rotten' people. Make people valuable again.

Start by reaffirming your own worth. Say to yourself, 'I don't deserve the shabby way I've been treated. His/her estimate of me does not determine my self-worth. I am a child of God and will hold my head up high. I am of infinite value to Jesus.' Then, when you have really accepted these facts about yourself, reaffirm the worth of the one who gave you a bad deal.

I had a rude awakening at my desk one evening as I nurtured a grudge growing to terminal proportions. Quite suddenly this thought struck me: If the only wrongdoer on earth was my adversary; if the only sin ever committed was his injustice against me, Jesus would have died for that man and that wrong. The Saviour would have left me with the ninety-nine and gone looking for this man whom I despise. This man, I realised, is of infinite value to Jesus!

God, I knew, was working repentance within me. Yet I resisted. 'Lord, how can you accept him?' I objected. My objection led me to another insight: the parable of the prodigal son was being replayed and I was the older brother. At this point, tears filled my eyes and I said to myself, 'I am an older brother that resents God killing a fatted calf for someone, who, in my view, is undeserving. Nevertheless, when the father finds me pouting outside and invites me into the banqueting room where my brother is, I will accept the invitation. I will join God at his forgiveness feast.'

Stop the Power Game

A forgiveness stalemate is usually nothing less than a momentous power struggle between offended parties. Usually, at least one of the participants uses the other's fault like a crowbar to lever him into emotional instability.

This may surprise you, but the one who has hurt you is under your control. What gives you that power is the offender's feeling of guilt. His shame is a button just waiting to be pushed. You are in a position to condemn, discredit, inflict pain, hold in bondage, blackmail—to control that person. What will you do with such horrible strength? This much is sure: as long as the power play continues, pardon will never happen.

Perhaps you are unwilling to let go of your power because you fear the consequences that will follow if you do. You are convinced that the only way to protect yourself is to refuse to forgive. Maybe you think, 'If I forgive that fraud he

will try to get-back into business with me,' or 'If I pardon that sick wife of mine I will have to take her back and she will hurt the children again.' But reconciliation is not the necessary sequel to forgiveness.

One would hope for total healing, total togetherness every time forgiveness is extended. Tragically, this is not always possible. Stephen prayed for the forgiveness of his persecutors. They heard his prayer, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge,' but nevertheless continued to pound the life out of him by throwing stones.

Try to get out of the power game. As long as you play this game, you are embroiled in the whole mess. Stop trying to control. Give up your power. Trust God. God's strength is made perfect in the weakness of your act of forgiveness.

Get Back in Touch with God's Grace

The problem that you face is that you don't feel like forgiving. You are on the ash heap outside the city. How can you be nice? You've got the information you need (i.e., forgiveness will be healthy for everyone), but not the motivation. You find yourself saying, 'I know I should forgive but I can't.'

It is now time to remember. Allow memory to take you by the hand and lead you to the place where God accepted, strengthened, and forgave you. Then just let appreciation expand inside of you. And when it does, gently cradle it as you would your firstborn. Now try forgiving again.

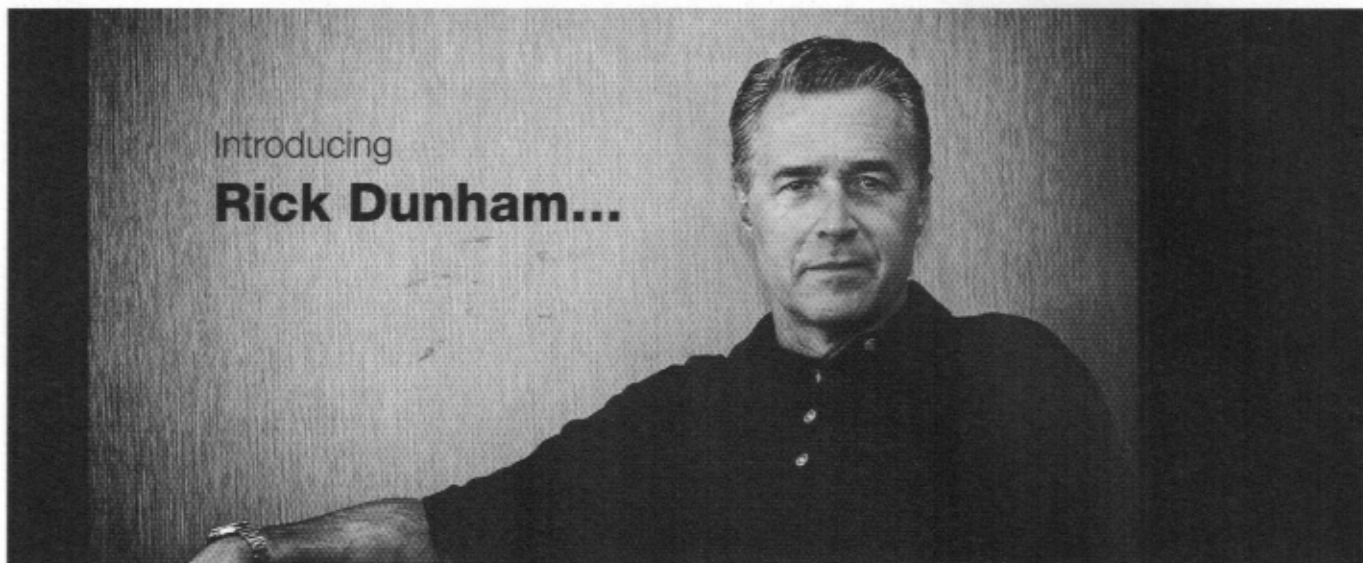
Jesus told the parable of a king, who in a staggering gesture of goodwill, released one of his subjects from an enormous debt. It was an amazing, let-your-mouth-hang-open kind of act. In one glorious instant the future of a prison-bound debtor was transformed.

But there is more amazement. Incredibly, the man did not react with appreciation. The gracious gesture, for all its power, did not move or stir him. This became apparent when he left the presence of the king to hunt down a debtor who owed him a paltry sum. 'You will pay me every last penny!' he yelled, as he shook the man. When the king heard of this episode, he became angry at such gross insensitivity and threw the man into prison.

This story brings us face-to-face with our obtuseness, our wrong-headedness, our pathetic lack of appreciation for the stunning grace of God to us. How feeble, how beggarly is our response!

Is it not time to surrender to the generous impulses God is throbbing through you? Is it not time to stop the fight, break the tension, bend a little, open up—forgive? ✨

Introducing
Rick Dunham...



WHEN I FIRST heard Rick speak about money I was struck about three things. He wasn't scared to talk about it; he talked about it with passion born of a love of the gospel; and he was absolutely true to the teachings of Jesus.

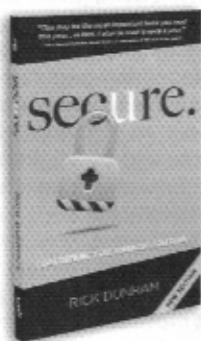
You don't often find people like that. And that's why I asked him to write a special article for our magazine. I'm so glad that he said yes!

What I can tell you about Rick is that he has a long track record in leading Christian ministries, and he is the founder of Dunham+Company, which works to enhance the reach of Christian ministries. Rick has been married for 40 years and has 3 children and 8 grandchildren. I'm sure you will be challenged by what he has to say in this article.

If you want to read more, his book "Secure" can be ordered from Koorong in Australia for AUD\$12.99.

In this article, he mentions tithing, and what he has to say may come as a surprise to some. As a theologian who has done a good deal of work in the New Testament, I can endorse what Rick says. Tithing is not a New Testament principle; even more, it is only ever mentioned by Jesus when He condemns the practices of the Pharisees. What the Lord calls for from those who have believed in the good news goes far beyond a monetary tithing.

Grace and Peace in Jesus!
Eliezer Gonzalez



It's Time to Give Up

A Call to Radical Stewardship

RICK DUNHAM

ONE OF THE most controversial subjects in the Church throughout its history has to do with money and giving. And it's no different today.

With the ageing of the boomer generation and the general accommodation of Christian boomers to the cultural worldview of money and wealth there are legitimate concerns about the future funding of the Church and Christian ministries.

I believe this breakdown in the view of money and giving begins with the failure of Church leadership to teach genuine biblical stewardship. To be fair, the issue of money and giving is the bane of nearly every pastor I know. Most hate to talk about it... and their congregations hate it when they do.

But here's the problem: Jesus makes it the centrepiece of following Him – of being His disciples.

An honest reading of Matthew 6:19-34 will uncover this truth. It's in this passage where Jesus tells us there's one thing that will determine where your heart is. And that is your treasure. Search the scripture and you won't find any other thing that determines the location of your heart. Nothing.

Money is like a powerful magnet that draws our hearts to wherever it's located. And Jesus knew... and still knows... that our natural inclination is to trust money for our security and not Him, which means we will store up our treasure here rather than invest it in the Kingdom the way God desires. That's why Jesus has to directly challenge us to place our treasure in the stuff of heaven rather than the stuff of earth.

And He goes so far as to say you can't truly worship Him if you are making the stuff of earth your priority.

We spend a lot of time working on our relationship with God in small groups, devotional time, going to church, doing missions... and yet all of that can't bring us into a deep relationship with God if we have the money thing wrong. Really.

That's why He says in Matthew 6:33, "But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." He's not talking about doing more Bible studies, going on more missions trips, spending more time at church, getting together with your small group more often, spending more time in prayer and daily devotions. He's talking about money. Seeking first His Kingdom is about where you put your treasure. Check out Matthew 6:19-34 if you don't believe me.

So what's the antidote? To give up. And here are five easy steps to do just that.

- 1. Stop Caring** – In Matthew 6:19-34, Jesus has some pretty powerful words as He exposes what drives us to get our priorities wrong. What He lays bare is the fact that we value our money more than Him, thinking it's a source of greater security than He could ever be. That's why He calls us out on our tendency to worry too much about the future because He knows that it drives us to place too much value on money. A sure sign that you've got this one right is when you stop caring so much about the future and instead do as He says, "Seek first the Kingdom of God"... which, in the context of Matthew 6, means making it a priority to invest your money in things that will last for eternity. It's time to give up worrying so much about the future and really place our lives at the feet of Jesus and live all out for Him.
- 2. Call it Quits** – That leads us to the second step of how to give up. And that is to stop treasuring the stuff



here on earth so much. Remember the parable of the guy in Luke 12:15-21 who had a bumper crop and decided to build a bigger barn and store it up (read: hoard it)? What did God say to him? *"You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself? This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."* Jesus wants you to quit living for the here and now and instead, live for eternity... being "rich toward God" with your money.

- 3. Forget about Tithing** – We have this notion that if we tip God 10 percent of whatever we earn, the rest is ours to do with as we please. The problem is the average Christian household in America only gives 2.8 percent to charity, and I don't believe it is much different across the Western world. We're not even good tipsters! In the parable of the talents, one of the points Jesus makes clear is that He owns it all, not just 10 percent. And because He owns it all, He really cares about what you do with **all** of it. He's not interested in your tithe; He's interested in how you will take what He's entrusted to you and use it **all** for Him. So give up on the tithe. Stop parsing percentages and instead see every financial transaction as something that has eternal importance.

- 4. Spend Wildly** – Revelation 3:14-22 is one of the roughest passages in the Bible. It's a picture of a very angry Jesus who is sick to His stomach and about to throw up. Why? Because His church... His people... have become lukewarm in their faith, having bought the lie that money is the ultimate source of security. They've allowed it to capture their hearts and are living in a world of false spirituality, which makes Jesus want to puke. His recommended antidote? To spend it wildly on the things that really matter... the things that are precious to God and will last for eternity. Then they will become truly rich. So give up on money as a source of security and instead spend it wildly on what Jesus cares about most.

- 5. Stop Serving** – Here's the deal. When it comes to money, there is no middle ground. No neutral zone. No DMZ. You are either serving God or serving money. Period. Jesus put it this way, *"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money."* You see, **your relationship to money determines your relationship with God.** And that's why it's such a big deal to Jesus. He wants your whole heart, not just part of your heart. And if money is your gig, then God isn't. So stop serving money. Give up thinking that money can be what only God can be in your life.

It's time to give up on pursuing the dream life and instead make our personal financial priority to give up all we can to see God's Kingdom advanced. To invest what God has entrusted to us for eternal returns. ✨

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Forgiveness



BOB & DEBBIE GASS

'Forgive – only then will your Heavenly Father...wipe your slate clean'
(Mark 11:25 TM).

How heavy is a glass of water? That depends on how long you have to carry it. A minute is no problem, and after an hour your arm might ache. But after 24 hours you'll probably be in bad shape! In each instance the glass weighs exactly the same, but the longer you carry it the heavier it feels. It's the same with a grudge—it can get so heavy it stops you from living.

People will hurt you; that's the reality of sharing this planet with others. Sometimes it's intentional, other times they've no idea they've upset you, far less broken your heart.

Does that mean you should go around pretending nothing's wrong? No, the first step is to confront your feelings. And when the hurt is deep, it's even harder to forgive. That's when you need to pray. The Bible says, 'Pray for those who mistreat you' (Luke 6:28 NIV). When you do that something unexpected happens; your heart softens and you start seeing them through God's eyes instead of your raw emotions. Jesus said, 'If you have anything

against someone, forgive – only then will your Heavenly Father...wipe your slate clean' (Mark 11:25 TM). When you sow unforgiveness you reap unforgiveness – even from God!

Isaac is a prime example of practising forgiveness. During a drought he dug wells that his enemies ... claimed. But instead of retaliating, he moved on and dug new ones. As a result God filled Isaac's empty wells and promised to bless him, and his children too! (See Gen. 26:22-23.) And He will fill the emptiness in your life, when you forgive those who have hurt you.

'People insulted Christ, but...He let God...take care of Him'
(1 Peter 2:23 NCBV).

A little boy who'd been rude to his Mum started sneaking off upstairs. 'Where are you going, young man?' she asked. 'To my room to talk to God,' he replied. 'Isn't there something you want to tell me first?' she said. 'Nope,' he said, 'You'll just get mad. God will forgive me and forget about it.' Long after you think you've forgiven somebody you can still be harbouring hard feelings.

Here are some clues that you've still got work to do: you get angry thinking about what happened; you give the offender the cold shoulder; you rehearse the incident mentally and in conversation; you seize every opportunity to remind the offender of what they did.

Refusing to forgive and forget is just another way of justifying an unforgiving attitude. The Bible says there are two things God won't share: (1) His glory (See Isa. 42:8); (2) His right to settle old scores. He said, 'Vengeance is Mine;

I will repay' (Rom. 12:19). Don't take over His authority by trying to get even; take your hands off the situation and let Him work it out. When 'people insulted Christ...

He did not insult them in return...He let God...who judges rightly, take care of Him' (1 Pet. 2:23 NCV). A grudge shackles you to the offender, and you become the hostage! Dwelling on something your parents did, or on how an associate took credit for your work, or on what someone said about you, makes you, not them, miserable. You walk around in turmoil and they don't even know you're upset! Why give somebody that kind of control over your life? What's important is what happens in you, not to you. So forgive, forget, and move on!

'[I] could never have made it apart from...mercy'
(1 Timothy 1:15-17 TM).

If you're finding it hard to forgive yourself for something you've done in the past, it may be that you're reaping what you have sown. And it's particularly hard (but not impossible) to keep from feeling bad when you've condemned somebody else for doing the same thing. Here's a Scriptural truth you need to understand, accept and live by: as long as you're alive you will have to keep forgiving - yourself and others!

When guilt and condemnation tell you

your sins are too big for God's forgiveness, remember what Paul said: 'Jesus...came... to save sinners. I'm proof—Public Sinner Number One ... someone who could never have made it apart from sheer mercy ... evidence of His endless patience' (1 Tim. 1:15-17 TM).

Before his conversion Paul persecuted the church, killing and torturing believers. It's how he made his living! And if he could learn to forgive himself, you can too! In fact, when you don't you're implying that your transgressions are beyond the scope of God's grace to forgive and Jesus' blood to cleanse. And that's a bigger sin—pride! Plus, when somebody always has

'issues' with other people, they may be looking for somebody to offend them; that way they can point out how bad the other person is and feel better about themselves. Pride and a judgmental attitude feed off each other the way humility feeds off forgiveness. God said, 'I, am the One who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake. And I will not remember your sins' (Isa. 43:25 NASB).

When you adopt a humble attitude and work on forgiving yourself the way God has, it's a lot easier to overlook other people's mistakes. Give it a try. You'll be amazed! ❄

You can leave a legacy that impacts people for years to come.

MANY OF YOU know that I am Des' daughter and a board member of Good News Unlimited. We appreciate so much the way that you have prayed for us, volunteered, and given us your financial support. In these ways you have expressed your faith in Christ and shared it with others.

But in addition to this, some friends also choose to include Good News Unlimited in their will in the form of a bequest. Doing so ensures that some of the wealth they leave behind contributes directly to the sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with a dying world through the ministry and mission of Good News Unlimited – creating a legacy that affects lives far into the future.

My father and Gill have left a bequest to Good News Unlimited for the preaching of the Gospel. In fact, after bequests to the family, most of their estate will be given to Good News Unlimited.

I am also making provision for Good News Unlimited in my will, and I know that other board members are doing the same.

There are so many who have supported Good News Unlimited for so many years; it is a comfort to know that the gospel can continue to go forward even while you wait for the trumpet call of Christ. You can have the knowledge today that people all around the world will continue to find the peace and assurance of salvation of Christ's finished work.

If you would like more information explaining how to include Good News Unlimited in your will, please contact Eliezer at GNU on 0413 473 043.

All blessing!
Elenne Ford



What it Cost Jesus to Die for You



RITCHIE WAY

MEL GIBSON'S movie, 'The Passion', released in 2003, depicts in shocking and graphic detail the brutal and gory scenes of Christ's flagellation and crucifixion. Nevertheless, as appalling as that episode of torture was, there must be more to Jesus' sacrifice than that excruciating and atrocious punishment because there have been many men and women who have endured worse.

Besides, why did Jesus experience such a depth of emotional trauma in the Garden of Gethsemane if he knew that all his problems would be over in just three days? Apparently Jesus' sacrifice involved more than just his physical and emotional suffering and the three days of oblivion that would follow it.

What kind of death, therefore, did Jesus die for us? The Bible teaches that because he took our place in the Final Judgement, the death that he died was the death that we would die after the Final Judgement had he not died in our place (1 Thes. 5:9-10). So what kind of death would that be?

The nature of the final punishment for sinners

What kind of punishment will be required of the unrepentant? Will sinners suffer eternally in hell fire, or will God ultimately cleanse the universe entirely of sin and sinners? Will the redeemed go into eternity knowing that sinners have been dealt with completely and justly, or will their enjoyment of Paradise be forever tainted by the knowledge that their unconverted friends and relatives are

enduring unceasing and eternal torture at the hands of a 'just' and 'loving' God?

The Bible tells us that the new earth and the new heaven will be 'the home of righteousness' (2 Pet. 3:10, 13). That, however, would hardly be an honest description of the future world if multitudes of sinners, who will vastly outnumber the saints, were being tortured day and night, year after interminable year, presumably somewhere on the same planet. What 'righteousness' could be found in such an unrighteous environment? The implication that such an excessively disproportionate punishment would be 'righteous' is morally repugnant simply because a 'righteous' punishment is one that matches the 'crime'.

But, in spite of our disquiet over this apparent grossly exorbitant punishment of sinners, there are statements in the New Testament that speak of the unrepentant being cast into eternally burning fire where they will be devoured by undying worms (Matt. 13:49-50; Mark 9:43-48; Rev. 14:9-11). In the light of the fact that the Bible is written in a number of different literary genres how should we understand these statements?

The New Testament references to eternally burning fire and undying worms that feast on sinners for eternity are quotations from the last verse of Isaiah.

Here is Isaiah's poetic description of the end of sinners:

Then they shall go forth and look
On the corpses of the men
Who have transgressed against Me,
For their worm shall not die,
And their fire shall not be quenched;
And they shall be an abhorrence to all
mankind' (Isa. 66:24 NASB).

Now if we accept that the insatiable worms and the unquenchable fire are literally true, then, to be consistent, we would also have to accept that it is not conscious people that will be consumed by fire and worm, but 'corpses' or dead bodies,

because that is what Isaiah says.¹ Get your Bible and read that verse for yourself.

How then should we understand Revelation where it speaks about the wicked being cast into 'a fiery lake of burning sulphur' (19:20). Jesus himself interprets this 'lake of fire' as 'the second death' (20:14). Note that it is 'the second death' not only for unrepentant sinners but also for death itself (Rev. 20:14-15). In plain language, this lake of fire is an apocalyptic symbol for the extinction of both death and all whose names are not recorded in the book of life.

Prose Statements in the Bible about the nature of Sinners' Punishment

Inasmuch as Isaiah, John the Baptist and Jesus used poetic or apocalyptic language to describe the fate of sinners we would be wise to consult those biblical passages on this subject that are written in plain prose if we really want the simple truth about the nature of sinners' destiny.

Here are a few:

- In Matthew 25:46 Jesus describes the destinies of mankind: The unrighteous 'will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.' In this verse the opposite of the life that lasts forever, is the punishment that lasts forever. Note that Jesus describes the reward of the wicked as eternal punishment, not eternal punishing—there is a vital difference. Daniel, similarly, describes the punishment of unrepentant sinners as 'shame and everlasting contempt' (Dan. 12:2).
- Whoever puts their faith in Jesus 'shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16). Here, the opposite of eternal life is to perish. Those who believe in Jesus receive 'eternal life' while those who reject him will 'perish'.
- 'The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life' (Rom. 6:23). In this verse the opposite of eternal life is

death—eternal death. The end result of sin is not unceasing torture but death.

- All rejectors of God's grace 'will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from God's presence' (2 Thes. 1:9; see also Matt. 7:13 & 10:28). The only way to be shut out of the presence of the omnipresent God would be to be annihilated with 'everlasting destruction.'
- The apostle Peter wrote: 'The present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men' (2 Pet. 3:7). The end of ungodly men, in plain language, is 'destruction.'
- The author of Hebrews says a raging fire 'will consume the enemies of God' (Heb. 10:27). God's enemies will be 'consumed', not toasted for eternity.

As these prose descriptions of the destiny of unrepentant sinners outnumber the poetic and apocalyptic descriptions of their end, honesty requires us to give them at least equal weight in determining our paradigm for the ultimate fate the sinners.

God's nature

When forming our understanding of how sinners will be punished, we should take into account the nature of the God who said, 'Love your enemies...and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful' (Luke 6:35-36; see also Luke 9:54-55).

We bear false witness against God when we allow our personal interpretation of his word to take precedence over Jesus' revelation of him as a loving God. A God who would roast for eternity a twelve-year old girl who rejected Jesus makes Moloch look like a saint.²

Malachi, who writes about the final judgement of God's enemies, agrees with Isaiah's and Daniel's descriptions of the ultimate fate of the wicked. He says,

'Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,' says the LORD Almighty. 'Not a root or branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,' says the LORD Almighty (Mal. 4:1-3).

According to Malachi the unrepentant shall eventually become inanimate 'ashes'.

On the basis of the above quotes we may confidently conclude that if salvation results in everlasting life, then the wages of

sin will eventually result in the opposite—everlasting death, that is, everlasting death for both unrepentant sinners and for Jesus.

Jesus and hell-fire

Here is a key question to ponder: If the punishment for the rejection of God is everlasting burning in hellfire, and if Jesus was judged and punished in our place, why isn't he burning in hellfire today?³

There isn't a single verse in the Bible that says Christ took our place in eternal fire, but there are many verses that say Jesus died for us. Here are some of them: Jesus said, 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep' (John 10:11). The apostle Paul wrote: Christ 'was delivered over to death for our sins' (Rom. 4:23); 'Christ died for the ungodly' (Rom. 5:6); 'While we were still sinners Christ died for us' (Rom. 5:8); 'Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures' (1 Cor. 15:3); God 'has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death...' (Col. 1:22); and 'Jesus Christ...died for us' (1 Thes. 5:9-10). The author of Hebrews said Jesus experienced 'death for everyone' (Heb. 2:9, 14-15). The apostle Peter wrote: 'Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous ...' (1 Pet. 3:18), and the apostle John wrote, 'Jesus Christ laid down his life for us' (1 John 3:16).

The intention in each of the above verses is to make it clear that Christ paid the full penalty for our sins when he died on the Cross. In his 'physical body' he paid the penalty that was ours to pay, and that penalty was death—the second death—total separation from the omnipresent God. When he cried out, 'It is finished,' he declared it in the perfect tense signifying that his sacrifice was wholly completed. 'Nothing further needed to be done.'⁴ It was a 'once and for all' sacrifice.

Now if Jesus died 'the second death' on the Cross, who are we to contradict that with the assertion that 'the second death' for unrepentant sinners will be different in that it will involve unending punishing that will continue long after all the suns in our galaxy have burnt out, and the Milky Way has collapsed into a gigantic Black Hole?

John Stott asks why martyrs are so eager and joyful to die for Christ, while Christ himself, when facing death in Gethsemane, was 'prostrate, sweating, overwhelmed with grief and dread, begging if possible to be spared the drinking of the cup.'⁵ While the death that martyrs die is the first death, a death with hope, the death that Jesus faced was the second death, a death with no hope.

When Jesus died on the Cross he experienced the death that all rejectors of his free gift of eternal life will experience. He rescued us 'from the coming wrath' by taking this punishment upon himself (See 1 Thes. 1:10; 5:9-10). He died believing he was about to be annihilated forever, with

no hope of a future beyond the grave. He was punished with 'everlasting destruction' and shut out from God's presence (Matt. 27:46; 2 Thes. 1:9). In our place Jesus died the second death.

He, who was equal with God in the most absolute sense, made himself nothing in the most absolute sense (Php. 2:6-7). He went from the highest place in the universe to the lowest; from heaven to hell;⁶ from absolute distinction to absolute extinction; from being the self-existing One to being the non-existent One.

The records of time and eternity do not contain a sentence that is more full of anguish than Jesus' cry, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' (Matt. 27:46). It is not death that is the ultimate penalty for sin—it is total and eternal separation from God. When God, who is the source of life, hope, joy and peace, abandons someone, all life, hope, joy and peace depart with him. And that is hell in the truest and most absolute sense. Apart from God there can be no existence at all, only a black hole of total extinction. It was into this black hole that Jesus plunged so that we wouldn't have to.⁷ That was the price he paid for you. The full and complete gift of himself was a gift that could never be excelled anywhere, anytime. ❀

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Hebrew word *peger*, may be translated carcass, corpse or dead body.
- 2 Moloch, the god of the Ammonites, was heated by an internal fire and little children were sacrificed to him by placing them in his red-hot outstretched arms. If people profaned God's name by giving their children as a sacrifice to Moloch (Lev 18:21; 20:1-5), how much more do we profane God's name by asserting that he roasts sinners for eternity.
- 3 Bruce Milne, in his book, *The Message of Heaven and Hell* (p. 185), addresses this question but his answer lacks substantiation. There are two elements to all punishment: its severity and its duration. There is, for example, a considerable difference between hard labour for one year and hard labour for thirty years. Because of his divine nature and his intimate relationship with the Father, the severity or intensity of Jesus' suffering on the Cross was much greater than what could be experienced by any unrepentant sinner. In the same way, in order for Jesus to atone for millions of sinners that reject his grace, the duration of his suffering should likewise be greater, not less, than that which could be experienced by any lost sinner. Milne, and others holding his view, fail to explain how Jesus compressed eternity into a few hours and, if such a condensation were possible, how it could be justified to unrepentant sinners who will not be granted this same option.
- 4 Merrill C. Tenney, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), s.v. John 19:30.
- 5 John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006), 89.
- 6 Timothy Keller says, 'Jesus experienced not only pain on the cross but hell itself' (*Is Hell for Real or does Everyone go to Heaven?* Eds. Christopher W. Morgan & Robert A. Peterson [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004], 75).
- 7 Jesus gave up everything to rescue us from the penalty of death, but death could not hold him because our sins were not in him, but on him. He paid the full penalty for our sin, but the Father raised him from the dead because his character had not been stained by our sins.

Letter from Pastor/Evangelist *Joseph Usala*

PASTOR JOSEPH USALA

(with Eliezer Gonzalez)

Dear Loving Pastor Eliezer

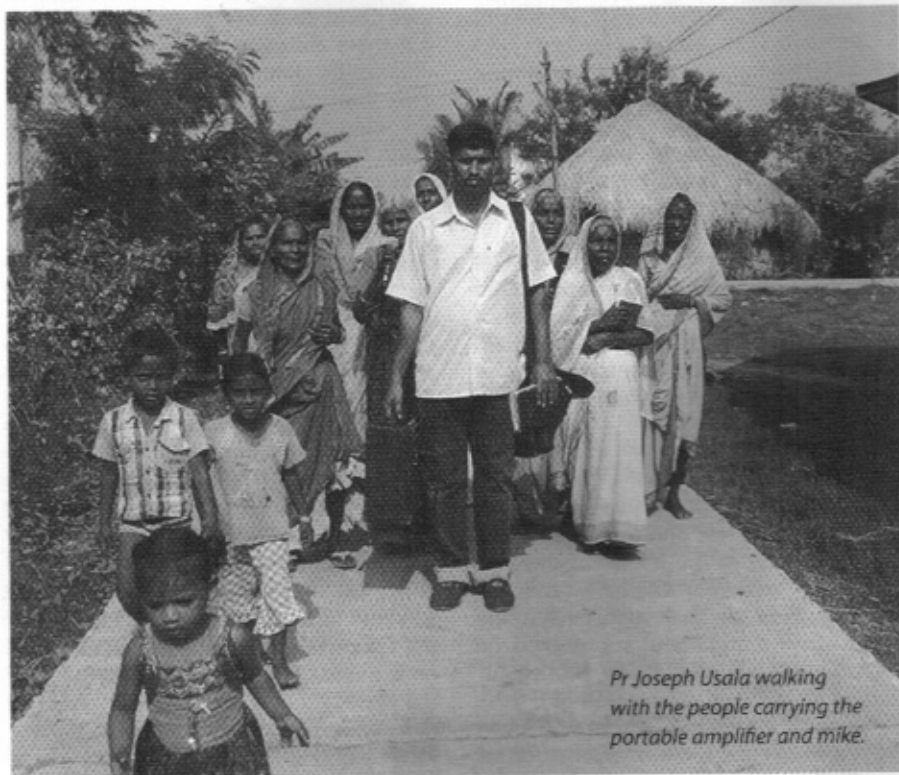
I GREET YOU in the love of Jesus Christ who has died for us in order to save our lives from sin. I am Pastor Joseph Usala. I have been doing God's work from one year ago among the Hindus in India. I have been praying and preaching the word of God in the unreached interior villages where people are living in thatched huts. It is the Holy Spirit who has called me, revealed to me that I must do God's work, and led me in everything.

Actually, I was born and raised up in the Roman Catholic Church. I learned about the Roman Catholic Church for ten years, and was training in theology, for the priesthood. I left the Roman Catholics during my first year of theology.

I became a schoolteacher and taught English for ten years. During all these ten years I was praying to God that he would reveal the truth and His will to me.

One day after school, as I was going home on my motorbike with my little son in the darkness, I had collided with another motorbike. Nothing happened to my son or to me. It was a big miracle for me and to all of the people who saw it. After that accident I left my job and decided to follow Jesus Christ's footsteps and to preach his life-changing teachings.

Now I travel from village to village preaching the gospel among the Hindus full-time. I base my ministry simply on the Bible as best as I can. I do God's work and proclaim the good news in various interior villages where the believers have arranged to use the common community halls for praying and preaching. At the moment I am working in three villages where there are orphans and old-aged people who suffer from lack of food and proper clothes and education. I have been looking after them in a limited way. I teach them the Word of God and give them spiritual strength, faith, and courage. Recently I have rented a room near these villages so that I can better serve God there.



Pr Joseph Usala walking with the people carrying the portable amplifier and mike.

I am also the overseer of an orphanage that is partially assisted by another church. But my ministry is only my own. I call it Gethsemane Power Ministries, because it expresses my desire to follow the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ. I am also a Sabbath-keeper. The mission of this ministry is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the unreached people, and especially the poor and needy.

Many of these people are uneducated, and they do not have an understanding of the gospel. They live very simple lives and many of them are from Hindu backgrounds. The gospel has not been preached in these villages. But the people also suffer from lack of drinking water, and because of this many of them get sicknesses and they have been suffering from different disease. At present, medical care and medical camps are also needed.

Because of Indian culture, it is difficult to change the minds of the people. It can take a lot of time for them to change to another way of life. So we must have a lot of patience and teach them the Word of God frequently. But once they change their way

of life, they certainly try to live according to their faith in Christ.

I am forever thankful to God that he saved my life and my son's life. I know that God has called me to do his tremendous work: to preach the good news to the poor and needy all over the interior villages of India. I am preaching the Word of God to them, so that even at their age they may know about Jesus Christ and enter into the kingdom of God.

My strong desire is to save these lost souls in India, so I request that you kindly remember me, and the ministry that I am doing for Christ, in your precious prayers.

Really, it is the Holy Spirit that made me to contact you. I have seen your wonderful website and I have read about your ministry. I am so happy and glad to join with your ministry. Your books and printed messages and videos are very, very necessary for my ministry. I can help to translate into my language, Telugu. I have a brother who can translate into Hindi. I am very happy and glad to suggest that we shall work together to spread the gospel in India. Loving pastor, you are most welcome

to my place when you come to India on your next trip. I will be delighted to see you and meet you in Christ.

Dear Loving Pastor, I thank Good News Unlimited so much for sending me the microphone and portable amplifier for my preaching in the community halls. I am so thankful to you in the mighty name of Jesus. It is useful for me in preaching the good news to the poor children and their families in the remote villages where they do not know about Jesus Christ. I tell everyone to pray for Good News Unlimited, and I thank you for your kind heart and generosity in the love of Jesus towards the Indian people.

I thank you a lot in Christ for giving me the great opportunity to share my life's story with Good News Unlimited.

Your loving servant in Christ
Pastor and Evangelist Joseph
Andhrapradesh, India



How Pastor Joseph received a BIG Voice for the Gospel

In my many discussions with Pastor Joseph, it became apparent to me that he needed a microphone and portable, rechargeable amplifier for his ministry from village to village.

It just so happened – well, nothing just happens, does it? – that one of our supporters had just such a piece of equipment sitting idle in a shed. This person was happy to donate it for Pr Joseph's gospel ministry, and Good News Unlimited was happy to send it to Pr Joseph.

So now, as Pastor Joseph travels from village to village, preaching to groups of people sometimes number over 100 people, he has, through the grace of God, a BIG voice with which to preach the gospel, and sing gospel songs. Pastor Joseph is regularly sending me testimonies of people whose lives have been transformed by the gospel.

God had obviously prepared all of this beforehand. And we here at Good News Unlimited are happy to be used by God. And Pr Joseph and the believers in India are happy as well. Pr Joseph has sent us this message:

I am so thankful to Good News Unlimited the mighty name of Jesus. I tell everyone to please pray for Good News Unlimited and I thank them for their kind heart and generosity in the love of Jesus towards the Indian people.

Grace and Peace in Jesus!
Eliezer Gonzalez



FACEBOOK & TWITTER ACCOUNT



*New times present new challenges.
And new challenges call for new methods.*

For this reason, Good News Unlimited has just set up some new ways of communicating, not just with you, but with the big wide world out there.



And what will we be communicating?

Simply the message that you know and love: the gospel of Jesus Christ—of his grace and righteousness. And of course we will be able to let you know about Good News Unlimited events in a much faster and direct way than ever before.

For those reasons, we have set up a Facebook account and a Twitter account. To access these you will need to set up your free accounts with either Facebook or Twitter, or both!

Facebook

If you don't have a Facebook account, you can get one at www.facebook.com

Once you have your Facebook account, you can go directly to: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/goodnewsunlimited/> to find the GNU Group.

Twitter

If you don't have a Twitter account, you can get one at www.twitter.com

Once you have your Twitter account, you can go directly to: <https://twitter.com/GoodNewsUnlimit>

If you don't have access to these, don't worry! We will continue to keep in touch with you in the same way that we have done so until now.

But we have already started putting spiritually uplifting messages and important announcements on Facebook every day.

WE ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING YOU ONLINE SOON!

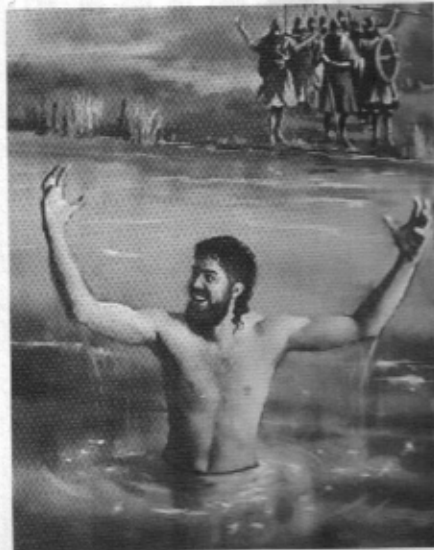
General Naaman's Conversion

RITCHIE WAY

NAAMAN, the commander of the army of the king of Aram (2 Kgs. 5:1), was a courageous general, but to the successful record of his life the Scriptures add this cheerless phrase, '... but he had leprosy.'

There was no one in Aram who could heal leprosy, but a young Israelite slave girl spoke up for her God. She said, 'If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy' (2 Kgs. 5:3).

Naaman, now with a glimmer of hope, loaded a wagon with expensive presents to purchase his cure and went straight to



the king of Israel. When he found no help there, in desperation he went to see the prophet Elisha, but the prophet refused to see him. Instead Elisha sent his servant to tell Naaman that if he wanted to be cured of his leprosy he had to dip seven times in the muddy waters of the River Jordan. Proud Naaman, offended by his reception, rode off in a huff, but was persuaded by his servants to humble himself and do as the prophet commanded.

Naaman dipped seven times in the river—a sign that he was willing to enter into a covenant relationship with the God of Israel—and was cured. (The Hebrew word *sheba* may be interpreted either 'seven' or 'covenant oath'). 'His flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy' (2 Kgs. 5:14).

Back at Elisha's house Naaman confessed, 'Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant.' The prophet answered, 'As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.' And even though Naaman strongly urged him, he refused (2 Kgs. 5:15-16).

The cure for sin, as for Naaman's leprosy, requires us to step outside of our comfort zone to seek the help of the God who is not well-known in our personal culture. It also requires that we humble ourselves and confess our sinfulness, and enter into a covenant relationship whereby God becomes our God, and we become his people. He will then wash away our sin so that we become whiter than snow. And he will do that for us freely, without cost.

Our lives are blighted by the 'leprosy' of sin. There is no one in our atheistic consumer culture who can help us. Instead we must enter the territory of our enemies (those who serve Christ) and seek help to remove our load of guilt. The counsel given is humiliating. We have to publicly humble ourselves by being baptised, as the outward symbol that our sins have been washed away. The Lord washes away our guilt and replaces it with the priceless gifts of joy and peace—the fruit of eternal life. Such a transformation is freely given to us by the Lord, without cost and without price. ✱

2014 SEMINARS

POTTSVILLE FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship meetings led by Pastor Ron Allen are held at 9:30 a.m. on the following Saturdays in 2014.

February	1, 15	August	2, 16
March	1, 15	September	6, 20
April	5, 26	October	4, 18
May	3, 17	November	1, 15
June	7, 21	December	6, 20
July	5, 19		

Venue: Reef Room, Pottsville Beach Neighbourhood Centre
12 Elizabeth Street, Pottsville Beach, NSW 2489.

Contact: Ron Allen – email: carron.741@gmail.com

GOOD NEWS FELLOWSHIP —Milton, Brisbane

GNU meetings are held every Saturday from 2:15 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., at the auditorium behind the Royal Geographical Society of Queensland (RGSQ) building at 237 Milton Road, Brisbane.

People are invited to come earlier and bring their lunch, beginning at 12:30 p.m. After lunch, our pastor, Eliezer Gonzalez, holds a Bible discussion and prayer, beginning at 1:15 p.m.

Our main presentation commences at 2:15 p.m.



Letters from Readers

GNU is a meeting of minds from a wide range of church affiliations and therefore opinions expressed in our articles may differ from that of our readers. Recognising that opinions can differ and we all have much to learn and unlearn, we encourage our readers to participate in this forum.



God's House
Today

Dear Editor

You mentioned in one of your articles that you had concluded that Daniel 8:14, as the climax of chapter 8, paralleled both Daniel 2:44 where God's kingdom will be the only kingdom after the others are destroyed, and Daniel 7:13-14 where the Son of Man is crowned King of a dominion that will not pass away.

I'm inclined to think you are right on the basis of Dan. 8:17, which says, 'The vision concerns the time of the end', Dan. 8:19, which says, 'The vision concerns the appointed time of the end', and Daniel 8:26, which says, 'The vision...concerns the distant future'.

What I would like to know, however, is how you interpret the words of Daniel 8:14—'It will take 2,300 evenings and mornings; then the sanctuary will be reconsecrated? What is this sanctuary that will be reconsecrated at 'the appointed time of the end'?

C.Q.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear C.

The general consensus of most Old Testament scholars is that the initial application of Daniel 8:13-14 was to the defilement of the Jerusalem sanctuary by Antiochus Epiphanes in 167 B.C., and its cleansing by the Hasmonean Jews in 164 B.C. It is recognised, however, that this defilement and cleansing was only a type of the ultimate defilement of God's house by Satan, and its cleansing by Jesus in the last days.

Because the 'last days' is a term that refers to the time when God himself would visit our world, it applies to both the first advent (Acts 2:14-17; 1 Cor. 10:11; Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20) and the second advent (John 6:39-40; 11:24; 12:48).

God's original dwelling place had been defiled by the great antichrist, Satan, but Jesus cleansed it by his blood (Heb. 9:14). Through his death

he atoned for wickedness and brought in everlasting righteousness (Dan. 9:24). All who avail themselves of this cleansing become God's new covenant sanctuary—a building of living stones in which he now dwells (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Heb. 3:6).

With regard to the period just prior to the second advent the apostle Paul says that in the Last Days the antichrist will usurp the place of the Lord and take over this temple (2 Thes. 2:3-4). As in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes the righteous will be trodden underfoot and the temple defiled by an anti-gospel religion. But Christ will come again and cleanse his sanctuary, not only of these apostates, but also of all sin and inclinations and predispositions to sin (1 Cor. 15:50-55; Php. 3:20-21). This will be the consummation when God's sanctuary of living stones will, in its entirety, be made right, justified and reconsecrated.



Last Minute
Repentance

Dear Ritchie

I used to rejoice when it was reported that so-and-so repented and gave his life to the Lord just before he died. One last-minute penitent I knew was the spouse of a dedicated church member, but who only came to church on special occasions like a Harvest Festival or Christmas Carol Service.

This man's wife was a humble, loving Christian who doted on her husband, but he refused to move until the journey his feet were on was just a step away from everlasting condemnation.

I don't want to be uncharitable, but it seemed to me that his decision to accept Christ with his last breath, as it were, was just as self-serving as the rest of his life. He wasn't prepared to make any sacrifices to step out and follow Jesus until it was impossible for him to do so.

Forgive me for being cynical, but I have to admit I was unable to join in the

rejoicing of the other Christians at his funeral.

Have I been too harsh in my judgement of this man?

F.S.

Ritchie's Reply

Dear F.

The only last-minute conversion in the Bible is that of the penitent felon who was crucified with Christ. This man, however, showed extraordinary faith in acknowledging Jesus as his Lord. Who else in the context of that situation would put their faith in a crucified 'Messiah'? No doubt the Holy Spirit led him to see what few others were able to see. And what he saw in Jesus totally overrode everything else at that execution site. He may not have understood why Jesus had allowed himself to be crucified, but he was convinced that Jesus was more than just a man.

I recently had the privilege of leading a young woman to Christ who was dying in a hospice of terminal cancer. Someone gave her a Good News Unlimited magazine in which there was an article that I had written on forgiveness. She asked to meet me, and my wife and I visited her several times before she died. This woman, who had been a high-flyer in the world of business and pleasure, had a complete turn-around in her life. Though she had never before read the Bible she now spent her hours reading the four Gospels about Jesus, and sharing her faith with her family and friends. There was a dramatic change in her life and she died with a smile in her heart.

So what about the people like the person you describe, F? I think the best we can do is to be charitable ourselves and hope for the best. The judgement will reveal what that man's decision really was.

Continued page 20





Jesus and the Holy Spirit

Hi Ritchie

I just have some questions about your article on the heavenly sanctuary in September's magazine, specifically, the issue of Christ's ministry among his people on earth today.

In John 14:16-17 Jesus said, 'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.' And in John 16:5-11 he told his disciples, 'It is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.'

If we agree that Jesus' incarnation was not a momentary thing, discarded after the crucifixion, then he cannot be omnipresent. Isn't that the purpose of the gift of the Holy Spirit?

I.R.

Ritchie's Reply

Hi I.

You ask about how Jesus can be omnipresent in our time, now that he is limited by a human body. And you rightly point out that his successor on Earth is the omnipresent Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17; 16:5-11).

Nevertheless Jesus did say, 'Where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them', and 'Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age' (Matt. 18:20; 28:20). These two verses indicate that Jesus himself is with us.

The only reply I can offer to your question is that we worship one God,

not three. When Philip asked to see the Father, Jesus answered, 'Don't you know me Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me' (John 14:8-10). Just as Jesus and his Father are one (John 10:30), so Jesus and the Holy Spirit are one, in the same manner that the Father and the Holy Spirit are one. The Holy Spirit is called both 'the Spirit of God' and 'the Spirit of Christ' (Rom. 8:9-10).

To us in the physical realm it is a mystery how this can be so, but we accept it by faith because, as the heavens are high above the earth so God's ways are higher than our ways.



'Image of God'

Dear Ritchie

I have a wee problem that I hope you can help me sort out. It's about the expression, 'Image of God.' Our preacher uses this phrase quite a lot in his sermons. He claims that everyone is made in the image of God, even sinners, and we need to recognise and look for that. He says things like, 'There is a bit of bad in the best of us, and a bit of good in the worst of us. That good,' he says, 'is a reflection of God's image in us.'

I would be very grateful if you could tell us what the Bible's definition of 'the image of God' is, because I find it very difficult to see the image of God in some people.

P.B.

Ritchie's Reply

Hi P.

The expression, 'image (or likeness) of God' is used in the Old Testament to refer to Adam's nature after God breathed his Spirit into him (Gen. 1:26-27). The Spirit, living through Adam, revealed that he had been made in 'the image of God'.

In the New Testament the phrase 'image of God' is given to 'Christ, who is the exact image of God' (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:3). Like Adam, Jesus also was born of the Spirit, which is why people could see the image of God in him.

This expression is also used of Christians who have been born again by the Spirit. Paul says of them, 'You have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the... image of its Creator' (Col. 3:9-10). Any believer who has the Spirit dwelling in him (Rom. 8:9) will reflect a degree of the image of God in his life.

One other verse that speaks of the image of God is Genesis 9:6:

Whoever sheds the blood of man,
By man shall his blood be shed;
For in the image of God has God made man.

This verse says that the lives of all men should be respected, not only because they were made initially in the image of God, but also in the hope that they might, once more, through the grace of the Lord Jesus, come to reflect God's image again.

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INTO ALL THE

World...

Obsessed by the Gospel

ELIEZER GONZALEZ PhD

DES IS VERY concerned about my health. He tells me to eat right, to exercise, and to rest – and above all, not to work too hard. All good stuff.

We are all grateful to God that Des has been preserved fit and well to preach the good news of Jesus Christ. If you ask him about it, he will tell you that there is no magic potion that he has been drinking, it is all due to God's goodness, and to following the Biblical principles of health. And so Des wants me to enjoy a ministry as long and as fruitful as his.

Of Des' advice for good health, the most difficult one for me to follow is the bit about not working too hard. You can beat me up about it as much as you like, but when I get my teeth into a project I am passionate about, I throw my heart and soul into it. And I am passionate about Good News Unlimited!

At Good News Unlimited, we are all about bringing people face to face with the gospel of Jesus Christ. When you read letters like Catherine's who writes,

Thank you for the good news message that you give every week. It has brought my husband and I much closer to Christ. I pray that this message will reach many who are thirsting for the word of God.

Since I last communicated with you through this page, so much has happened! More translations into more languages. More contacts with gospel ministries overseas. Technology improvements. In everything, we see the Lord's leading.

I read recently that someone said that plans are the things that humans put together so God can change them and show us what He really

wants. It has truly been a humbling experience to work with the board of Good News Unlimited to make plans to start a new gospel movement throughout the world. I have worked with many boards in the corporate world before, but never one with such a deep heart for the mission that God has entrusted to it! Look out for the initiatives that we will be announcing over the next few months.

There is nothing, but nothing, that we at Good News Unlimited want more than to get the gospel of Jesus Christ out there. It is a fire that consumes our bones. It is a longing that only the end of sin can satisfy. It is a duty to which we are blood-bound by the sacrifice of Calvary. It is a mission that has been entrusted to us by the Risen Lord Himself.

Let me share with you that Des is enthusiastic; he is on fire for what is happening at Good News Unlimited! So there's no way I am going to slow down.

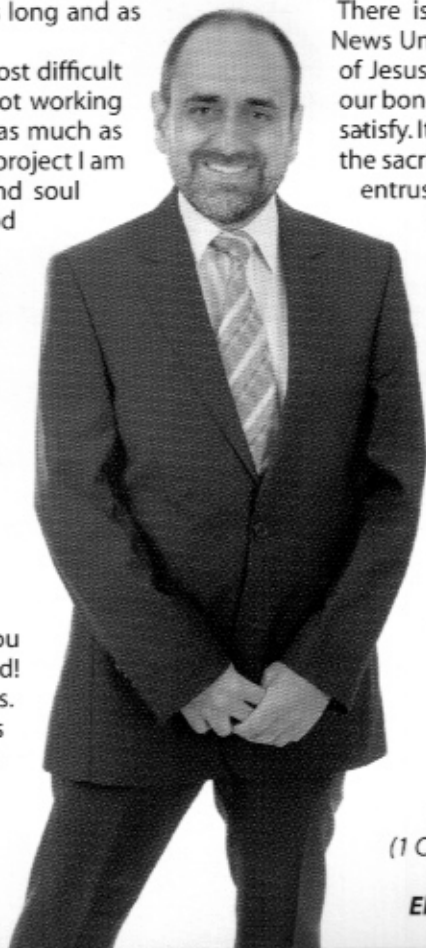
So what about you? Don't let this world slow you down in your love for Christ; in your work for the gospel. The world perishes while Christians take their rest!

I'm almost certain that Des will roundly counsel me about what I have written here, and emphasise the importance of my health... and I intend to look after it, and I urge you to do so as well.

But most of all I choose to live according to the words of the apostle who wrote,

when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Cor 9:16, NIV).

Eliezer



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