

April 2012 - Vol. 59



The Passover of Jesus Christ

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive blessing and glory (Rev. 15:12)

- [New Life in Christ: Passover of Christ results in new spiritual life](#), by Steve Clark
- [The Lamb that was slain has given us new life](#), by Melito of Sardis (2nd century)
- [The Cross of Christ gives life to the human race](#), by Ephrem of Edessa (4th c.)
- [The Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen Christ](#), by Dieterich Bonhoeffer

Godly Zeal

- [What does it mean to be a zealous Christian?](#) by John Keating
- [I Will Build You a House](#), by Dave Hughes

Hunger for God

- [Dislocation](#), by Andy Jordan
- [Finding the Key to Happiness](#), by Rachel Nevinger

Dawning Light

- [I Will Awake the Dawn](#), song and reflection by Ed Conlin
- [Road to Emmaus](#), painting and reflection by John Dunne

God's Word Alive

- [The Triumph of the Cross: The Lord has risen indeed!](#) by Jeanne Kun
- [What Is the Resurrection of Jesus?](#) by Josef Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI

Build to Last

- [Coherence: A Gift of Christian Community](#), by Bob Tedesco
- [Order in Marriage: Does the Bible really mean what it says?](#) by Jerry Munk

Hearing God

- [Hearing God and Controlling the Situation](#), by Sam Williamson
- ["Speak, Lord, your servant is listening,"](#) by Don Schwager

Counter Cultural

- [A Great Distraction](#), by Michael Shaughnessy
- [Defending Religious Freedom](#), statement by Evangelicals and Catholics Together

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New Life in Christ

by Steve Clark

Shortly before his death, Christ received an urgent message that Lazarus was dying. Lazarus was someone he loved, a close sympathizer, possibly a disciple, possibly also a member of the Sanhedrin. Martha and Mary, the sisters of Lazarus, seemed to expect Christ to come quickly and heal their brother.

Christ gave an enigmatic response: “This illness is not unto death,” but for the glory of God as a means to glorify God’s Son (John 11:4). His disciples probably understood Christ’s statement as a prediction that Lazarus would recover. The fact that he was in no hurry to leave may have even confirmed such an understanding in their minds. But two days later Christ told them that Lazarus had died and that therefore he would go to Lazarus’ home at Bethany.

Bethany was very near Jerusalem, in the area under the direct rule of the Jewish governing authorities who had shown every intention of putting Christ to death if they could. The disciples saw no point in running such a risk now that Lazarus had died. But the very fact that Lazarus had died seemed to motivate Jesus to go.

On their arrival, Christ was met by Martha. By then Lazarus had been dead four days. She knew that Christ had delayed, despite the urgency of her message. Her plaintive greeting – perhaps reproachful, perhaps simply regretful – was, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” Christ replied, “Your brother will rise again” (John 11:21-23).

Like many Jews, Martha believed in the resurrection of the dead and so answered, “I know that he will rise again in

the resurrection at the last day.” She may have thought Christ was simply consoling her because of his disappointing delay. His next words, however, pointed to something different: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die” (John 11:25-26).

These words contain the core of Christ’s message to Martha. The resurrection is not simply something that happens on the last day to all good Jews. I bring resurrection. I bring the only resurrection worth having, a resurrection to true life. I bring life. I am the one who can raise the dead and give life to whom I will (Jn 5:21). Even more, those who believe in me will here and now be given a kind of life that will not be destroyed by normal human death but will last forever.

Christ then went to the tomb. The body of Lazarus had already begun to putrefy, but he was undeterred. He had even delayed so that the death of his friend would be beyond doubt. Christ cried out in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.” And Lazarus came out.

It was for this that Christ had come to Bethany. He did not come to keep himself safe, to save his own life. He knew that coming to Bethany was a step toward giving himself for the life of the world (John 6:51). Rather, he came to raise the dead. Moreover, he did not come only to raise them at some future point long after they had died. He came to give them new life on earth. He came so that they might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10), even before they “go to heaven”.

Paul described becoming a Christian as being “brought from death to life” (Romans 6:13). Of all the descriptions of the result of redemption, that is perhaps the most dramatic. Purchasing a slave or pardoning a criminal seem tame beside raising the dead. When Christ called out to the putrefying Lazarus, “Come forth” and Lazarus came forth, Christ proclaimed by that sign the magnitude of the change he came to bring. It would be like raising the dead.

Moreover, giving life to those who believe in him would require the same kind of power as raising Lazarus. Christ would give them eternal life. By his power, human beings would be able to have a kind of life on earth that could not be destroyed by their earthly deaths.

“As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Christ came to reverse what Adam did, to restore the life Adam lost, to bring human beings to the place where they could fulfill the purpose for which they were created. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

We have considered what Christ did to make it possible for human beings to be redeemed. In the last chapter, we saw how Christ entered into the position where he could provide redemption for those who came to him. In this chapter, we will look at the way redemption is given to those who believe in Christ and join themselves to him.

In and by the Spirit

Passover and Pentecost were closely linked in the old covenant festal calendar, because Pentecost was the conclusion of the Passover season. The season began with “the Lord’s Passover”. The day after the Sabbath of the seventh week afterwards, an important feast was celebrated (Leviticus 23:15-16). As the fiftieth day of the season, it was called “Pentecost” from the Greek word for “fiftieth”. In New Testament times, the Jews probably celebrated Pentecost as the day of the giving of the ten commandments on Sinai, the day on which the people of Israel entered the covenantal relationship with God that was made possible by the Passover and Exodus.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit did not happen on the day of Pentecost by accident. Just as the death and

resurrection of Christ fulfilled “the Lord’s Passover”, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit fulfilled the feast of Pentecost. Through that gift of God, the disciples came into the fullness of the blessing of the new covenant, the new relationship with God made possible by Christ’s redeeming work.

Such an understanding of the relationship between Sinai and Pentecost is probably behind a statement in Second Corinthians 3. Paul is there defending himself from criticism by saying that the Christian community at Corinth is a letter of recommendation for him. Others can look at them and see that Paul is able to bring into existence a body of people who have the new life Christ came to bring. In that context he says, “You are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts” (2 Corinthians 3:3).

Paul is referring to the two stone tablets, or as we often say in older English “tables”, on which God wrote the ten commandments (Deuteronomy 5:22). Moses described these commandments as the covenant the Lord our God made with us (Deuteronomy 4:13). Paul is saying that in the new covenant, the Holy Spirit writes the commandments of God on the hearts of Christians so that the change in the way they live can be “known and read by all men” (2 Corinthians 3:2).

Paul then adds another statement. “God...has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Corinthians 3:5-6). The two statements go together. The new covenant relationship with God is not a matter of external instructions to be read and carried out, but a matter of a new life put into believers by the Holy Spirit. As a result, new covenant people will be enabled by the Spirit within to live the life of love of God and neighbor and so keep the commandments. Further on Paul adds, “We...are being changed into his image [RSV: likeness] from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). In other words, that new life is a restoration of the inner glory that Adam and Eve lost and that allowed them to live in the image and likeness of God.

The Holy Spirit is the life-giver, the one who gives life. Life is a kind of activity. A corpse cannot move by itself, nor is there in a corpse any internal activity like the flow of blood or the process of digestion. Without this kind of activity, the complex organism built to sustain life will slowly crumble to dust, the dust from which the human race came. The presence of the Holy Spirit produces the opposite of death. He does not normally make corpses alive, but when he comes to people he makes a kind of activity possible for them that was not possible before – a life that fulfills the purpose for which human beings were made.

The Holy Spirit gives that life to Christians from the inside, “the heart”. He “dwells in” the followers of Christ (Romans 8:7). He “fills” them. The Holy Spirit does not just “come upon” Christians from time to time as he did with old covenant people. He comes upon them and then abides or remains in them (John 1:32-33). Although present in the Christian as in a temple (Ephesians 2:22), the Holy Spirit is not there primarily to be worshiped. Rather, he is present to act inside of Christians so they can live in ways impossible without him.

Whenever the Scriptures speak about the Holy Spirit, they are normally describing some way in which God is acting in the world. He is the power of God at work or, as some have said, the “executive” of the Trinity. Christians are said to live or act “by” the Spirit or “in” the Spirit. “In” probably refers to his enabling agency. If we are walking along and come to a deep river, the water is an obstacle to our walking further. We cannot walk through the river to the other side. But if we go into the water and swim, we can move by means of the water to the other side. When the Holy Spirit dwells in Christians, his presence in them operates in a similar way. Like water, he operates as a kind of spiritual “medium” in relationship to God and the things of God. He enables us to have “access...to the Father” (Ephesians 2:18). He gives us a spiritual contact with God and knowledge of God that allows us to relate to God and spiritual realities in a way we could not otherwise.

The indwelling of the Spirit does even more than allow Christians to act in ways they might want to but cannot. He changes the very way they want to live. The Letter to the Ephesians uses a vivid image in encouraging Christians to avoid carousing with pagans: “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father” (Ephesians 5:18-20).

This exhortation contrasts being “filled with wine” and being “filled with the Spirit”. When people are filled with wine, others who have not even seen them drinking can recognize their condition by their drunken behavior. The word “filled” does not mean that the wine has simply taken up all the room inside. Rather, it means that the wine has entered into them in such a way that it affects or controls their behavior. They could be described as “under the influence”. “Filled” here, as in other places in the Scriptures, means “ruled” or “directed”.

Christians are encouraged instead to be filled with the Spirit. When people are filled with the Spirit, others can tell by their behavior. Being filled with the Spirit especially produces worship and thankfulness to God, as noted in the Ephesians passage. The change the Spirit produces, however, is not just restricted to worship.

A fuller description of the new life produced by the Holy Spirit is contained in the passage on the “fruit of the Spirit” in Galatians 5:13-26. Fruit is produced by life inside. Spiritual fruit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and the like.” These qualities form a way of living and acting, especially a way of treating others. Those, therefore, who “live by the Spirit”, those who have the Spirit in them giving life, should “walk by the Spirit”. They should act in a way that expresses the life they have been given (Ephesians 5:16, 25). Just as we expect to see a difference between the behavior of dogs and human beings, we should be able to see the difference between those who have spiritual life and those who do not.

The passage about the fruit of the Spirit also raises a crucial and somewhat subtle point in understanding the results of the redeeming work of Christ. In the course of discussing the fruit of the Spirit, Paul says Christians are not “under the law” (Galatians 5:18). Another passage says they are “discharged from the law” (Romans 7:6).

Many understand “law” or “the law” in such passages to be referring to the law of the old covenant. They therefore understand Paul to be talking about freedom from old covenant regulations, especially those involving matters of ritual and purity and the rabbinic interpretations of those regulations. Others understand “the law” to refer to all law, including the moral law, and understand Paul to be talking about freedom from condemnation under the law because of what Christ has done. Still others understand Paul to be talking about freedom from any obligation to any moral law, although such a position seems clearly untenable.

Without going into the issues connected to freedom from the law, we can see that the Galatians passage makes clear that Christians should not act or behave in a way that violates the moral commandments of God. “Fornication, impurity, licentiousness” and the rest of the “works of the flesh” or actions that come from sinful human nature disqualify people from the kingdom of heaven (Galatians 5:19-21). Such actions are so opposed to the life of Christ as to be intrinsically incompatible with it. Christians have to be “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11).

The Galatians passage also makes clear that Christians have to choose or decide at times not to do such things, even to fight against them. They will not be able to passively let the Spirit produce all manner of good behavior in them, while they coast along. Christians are called to “walk” a certain way and not gratify certain desires (Galatians 5:16). To use a stronger phrase from Romans, they need to “put to death” those desires (Romans 8:13). Since they

experience conflicting desires (Galatians 5:17), Christians must take an active role in deciding which ones will prevail.

Nonetheless, the Christian life is not supposed to be primarily a new summons to greater moral effort. Nor is it simply a matter of keeping the law, however necessary it may be to keep God's commandments (1 Corinthians 7:19). Christianity is a new life that comes from the indwelling presence of the Spirit. Fallen human beings cannot live in a way pleasing to God (Romans 8:7). Redeemed human beings not only can, but they find within themselves a new life moving them and enabling them to live in a new way.

The Holy Spirit is "power from on high" that allows redeemed human beings to live in the image and likeness of God. It is not the power of an alien being that controls and possesses them, but rather a divine presence that gives them a new capacity to live well by healing or restoring their human nature. The Holy Spirit within does not act like a drug that produces an abnormal or unnatural effect. Rather, he acts more like food or drink or healing medicine that strengthens human nature – taking away the wounds of sin, restoring appetite for goodness and truth, and stimulating an appetite for and delight in goodness and righteousness.

The passover of Christ, then, results in new spiritual life. That life comes from a special gift, a new presence of God inside those who believe in Christ. The Holy Spirit acts within Christians to restore what was originally created within them so that they can live in a way they could not while under the slavery of sin. Redemption for Christians, then, involves the restoration of the life-giving presence of God in human beings.

In Christ

Two Adams

The Holy Spirit brings us the blessing or gift that comes to us as a result of the redeeming work of Christ. The Scriptures often use the phrase "through Christ" to speak about how the priestly service of Christ makes that life possible. For instance, Paul says in Romans, "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him, we have access to this grace in which we stand" (Romans 5:1-2). "Through Christ" here probably refers to the priestly, mediatory activity of Christ that makes redemption possible.

A different phrase, used mainly in Pauline writings, also indicates how the new life comes to us – "in Christ". At times this phrase seems to be used fairly broadly as the equivalent of "Christian" (for instance, 1 Thessalonians 1:1). In other passages, like the following, it seems to have a special meaning:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us... In him you also, who have heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and have believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit...

Ephesians 1:3-8, 13

We see in this prayer that it is "in Christ" that we receive blessing from God. It is in Christ, the High Priest, that we can be "holy and blameless before him", able to come into God's presence as priests ourselves. It is in Christ, the beloved or only Son of God, that we can be sons of God by adoption. It is in Christ that we receive the Holy Spirit.

The phrase “in Christ” indicates a personal union between Christ and the Christian. The truth is expressed throughout the New Testament that redemption and salvation come to people as a result of entering into a personal relationship with Christ. Paul puts a special emphasis on that relationship and develops it in important ways, especially with respect to the original creation, and he uses the phrase “in Christ” to refer to this special orientation.

Behind Paul’s use of this phrase is probably the understanding of Christ as the new Adam. Paul does not necessarily have Adam explicitly in view every time, but his understanding of the way redemption comes to us is connected to the way we were once “in Adam” and now have come to be “in Christ”. “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Christians receive the benefits of the death and resurrection of Christ by coming into a “personal relationship” with him. That term could mean a great variety of things, some not very substantial. Two people who simply walk past one another every day and nod in recognition could be said to have a personal relationship. The word “union” is a more traditional word for the Christian’s personal relationship with Christ. It is a better word to use in English because it indicates an ongoing bond that keeps two people together in an active relationship. We speak, for instance, about a “marital union” to refer to the bond of shared life between husband and wife.

Redemption comes to us through a personal union with Christ that is both similar and dissimilar to the relationship we have with Adam. To be “in Adam” is simply to belong to the human race in its ordinary state. In many ways, the difference between one human being and another, or one family and another, is more important for determining how our life goes. But in certain respects, it is our humanity that counts, and our redemption is one of them.

We belong to a race that is not in a good relationship with God. In all its cultural variants our race has a way of life that in many respects is sinful. Moreover, we are born into that sinful way of life, which is rooted in weaknesses and tendencies inside of each one of us. As sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, we belong to a race with certain common unfortunate characteristics and a common spiritual predicament.

Human beings, however, now have the possibility of a new life. They can come into a relationship with the new Adam, the head of a new human race. They can join a body of people that belongs to him. When they do, they will share the way of life of that body, which is derived from the head and reflects his character. They will be identified with him and treated differently. They will be persecuted by his enemies simply because they belong to him, but they also will be treated by God with special recognition simply because they belong to him.

Their relationship with the new Adam, however, will differ in some important respects from that with the old Adam. They had an inherited relationship with the old Adam that came from being born into a race with a common nature and way of life. The relationship with the new Adam will be immediate and contemporaneous. All human beings can have a direct personal union with Christ – indeed, must have in order to be a Christian. Their relationship with this new Adam will also be spiritual. It will come through the presence and action of the Holy Spirit joining them to God in Christ, maintaining that union and giving them a new life.

New Life in Christ

Union with Christ brings restoration of the ability to fulfill the purpose for which we are made. In Christ the fall is overcome and the human race is recreated. The change this makes was described in the section on the work of the Holy Spirit. The new life that comes to us by means of the Holy Spirit is identical with the new life that comes to us in Christ.

When we speak about new life coming to us “by the Holy Spirit”, we are concerned with the way that life is produced by the abiding presence of God in us. When we speak about new life coming to us in Christ, we are

concerned with how our reception of that life depends upon the incarnation. It depends, in other words, on the way God joined himself to human nature through the Son of God becoming human, and then united other human beings to himself by way of a relationship with his incarnate Son.

Our relationship with God was originally intended to be one of sonship, as we saw in the creation of Adam. Redemption is based upon a restoration of that relationship with God. By being joined to the Son of God and sharing in his relationship with his Father, human beings can become sons and daughters of God – not by nature but by adoption.

This change is in part a matter of healing a bad or problematic relationship due to sin. It is also, however, a matter of restoring “closeness”. In Christ human beings are “brought near” to God. As a result of being brought “into” Christ, redeemed beings can share his own relationship with God and relate to God “in his name”, that is, in his person (John 16:23-27). They are given a share in Christ’s own closeness to his Father.

They become like the children of a king. Thousands of people have a relationship with a king, although most of them may never see him or exchange greetings. The king’s children, however, have a close relationship with him. They can come and go in his house as they wish, ask his help when in need, even at times charge their bills to his account.

Along with a change of relationship comes a change inside of us. The Scriptures describe this change in a number of ways. Paul often says that God makes the dead alive in Christ. “You who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him” (Colossians 2:13). He speaks about redeemed human beings having a new “nature” or, more literally, becoming “a new human being” (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). Other passages talk about Christians being “born anew” (John 3:3) or receiving “regeneration” (Titus 3:5).

When people become Christians, they are not physically dead, like Lazarus, and raised to life. Nor do they go back into their mothers’ womb to be reborn, as Nicodemus suggested. Nor do they receive a completely new nature becoming like angels, no longer human at all. Rather, they have been transformed from human beings who are so sinful that they normally live in a way displeasing to God, into human beings who can actually live in a way pleasing to God. The change is substantial enough to say that they have become a different kind of human being.

A helpful translation is “new human being”, which indicates both that we remain human when we are redeemed, but also that we become capable of living in a genuinely new way. The change is similar to the metamorphosis that happens when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly. As we have already seen, in the transfiguration and in the resurrection, Christ was metamorphosed into a new kind of human being. Like the butterfly or caterpillar, his human nature was restructured or reshaped so that he could function in a new way. When we are redeemed, we are changed in a similar but less complete way into a new kind of human being. Some day, when we are glorified, the change will be completed so that our humanity will be like Christ’s. In the meantime, we experience the first stage of that change, and that first stage provides us with “newness of life”.

Redeemed human beings, then, have been reshaped or reformed according to a new principle of life. Joined to Christ, they now receive a life that comes from him. They “bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:49), who in turn is the image and likeness of God in a full way. The redeemed have been given the Holy Spirit, so that the way they live is no longer ruled by the principle of death and sinfulness, but by the principle of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:2).

Unlike butterflies that can no longer live like caterpillars, redeemed human beings can return to their previous mode of existence or slip back into it in various ways. However, that does not negate the fact that they have been given a

new life. They now have a choice because they have an internal power to behave differently.

When Christians receive this new life, Christ shares with them what he himself is. Paul goes so far as to say, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). Paul does not mean this in the sense of spirit-possession. Christ does not take away our freedom so that we become like puppets. He does not even mean it in the sense of an air controller directing a pilot. Christ does not continually tell us what to do: walk over here, say thanks to the nice lady, sit down and take a rest.

Rather, Paul is saying that the “I” of the old nature, the “sinful flesh”, no longer determines how my life goes. It is now the life Christ himself lives, his attitudes and character, that shape how I live and act. His power and the internal change that comes to us from him make this possible.

Christ is the source of our new life. Paul said “Christ...is our life” and “your life is hid with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:4, 3). But he is not the source in a simply external way, the way human parents are. Once we receive life from them, our bodies can function on their own. Christ himself not only gives new life to us, but we can only keep that life as we stay united with him. We are like a kidney that cannot function outside the body. Or to use a more scriptural example, we are like a branch that can only die once separated from the vine (John 15:1-11).

In considering the redemption, we have focused largely on what Christ did for or instead of us. He paid a price instead of us. He underwent a punishment that was accepted for us, so we did not have to undergo it. He offered the sacrifice of himself so we did not have to die. Christ humbled himself and by his humility deserved something we could not deserve. But he also died, came back to life, and now lives a new kind of life. He does not live that life instead of us. Christ lives that life so that he can share it with us and make it possible for us to live it. He does that by letting us be joined to him and so live the way he does – in him.

The change in Christ when he died and came back to life is an integral part of our redemption. When Christ died and rose, the divine nature and glory that was present in his humanity enabled his humanity to come back to life and live in a new way. He now has a human life transformed by the indwelling presence of God. Christ’s glorification allows him to live a life freed from the “weakness” of human fallenness.

In a similar way, when Christ unites himself to us, the presence of his divine life in us through the gift of the Spirit gives us the power to overcome the fallenness of human life. We can grow into a godlike character. We have a life that will be able to last to all eternity. That divine life enters into and changes our spirits now. Someday it will transform our bodies as well and with them the way we live in every respect.

Eastern churches commonly use the term “deification” (*théosis*), sometimes translated “divinization” to describe the way Christ shares his own life with us. Although the Western fathers and many subsequent great Western theologians sometimes used the term, most Western writers have tended to avoid it since it seems to imply the claim that we can actually become the same as God. In Eastern Christian teaching, however, the word simply expresses the truth of Second Peter that Christ became human to allow us “to escape from corruption” or mortality and “become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). It is another way to speak of newness of life, life raised to a new level by the presence of God in us. We do not receive a fully divine life so that we are now omnipotent and eternal of ourselves. We receive a human life transformed by the divine presence working in us – or as some translations put it, energizing us. We receive a human life now able to participate in the divine life in an effective way.

Théosis or deification, then, is what is offered to us, scandalous as the term may sound at first. We are to become “godlike”. We are not to become “like God” in the way the devil offered to Eve to be “like God” – independent of him and rivals of him. Rather, we are to become like God as his sons and daughters, created in his image and

likeness and now able to live in his image and likeness because we have received the life of Christ, the true image or icon of God. Christ died and rose so we could come to the glory of the sons and daughters of God.

Joined to Christ

Many things in the Old Testament, like the temple, functioned the way they did because they were designed for the old covenant before Christ came. The new covenant operates somewhat differently. Nonetheless God gave the old covenant in part so it could reveal to us truths that allow us to understand new covenant realities. One of them concerns the danger of coming too close to God.

For those who are not ready for it, the presence of God is destructive. At Sinai God warned the people of Israel not to come up onto the mountain (Exodus 19:12, 21). When the ark of the covenant was being brought to Jerusalem, Uzzah, the man who touched it in an attempt to steady it, died instantly like someone who had unwittingly touched a high-tension wire (2 Samuel 6:7). When the glory of God filled the temple, those who were worshipping God and were close to the holy of holies could hardly bear it (1 Kings 8:10-11). The presence of God is like a lightning bolt. Some things can bear it. Most things are burnt up by it. “Our God is a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29).

If we lose sight of this truth, we lose sight of who God is. He is not the Great Teddy Bear on high, the nicest of all things in the universe. He is the awesome creator of all. He himself is power, pure energy. More importantly in this context, without this truth we lose sight of what Christ has done. He has not just disposed God to pardon our sins and not banish us from his presence eternally. He has brought us into God’s presence and God’s presence into us. He has brought the fearful power of God into us – for our blessing, not for our destruction.

There is an account in three of the gospels about a woman who sought Jesus to heal her (Mark 5:24-34). She had had a “flow of blood” for twelve years. The flow was perhaps painful and no doubt awkward, but it also, according to old covenant law, made her constantly unclean. If she were not to convey uncleanness to others, she would have to avoid them. She had spent much time and money on physicians, but to no avail. Then she heard about Christ.

What she heard awakened faith. This one could heal her. If she could simply make contact with him, she would be made well. As she approached him, she found herself in a large crowd, all of whom were interested in him. She made her way to him and touched his garment, perhaps the tassel that was a sign of his dedication to obedience to God. “Immediately the hemorrhage ceased; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease” (5:29) Like many sick people who begin to heal, she had an internal perception of the physical change. Christ, at the same moment, perceived “in himself that power had gone forth from him” (5:30).

He wanted to know who had touched him. Given the crowds around him, the answer might be 10–20 people. One person, however, had touched him in a different way, reaching out in faith. She knew he was referring to her. She had received the power coming into her and knew that she had by its effects. She came to him and acknowledged what had happened. He responded, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease” (5:34). There was a connection between her faith and the power of God that came through Christ into her. Because she was able to touch him in faith, she received power through that contact.

We are reading an account of something that happened to someone in the old covenant. In the person of Christ the new covenant was already “at hand”, but not yet fully operative. The woman with faith received a physical healing, because she made contact in faith with the Lord himself. What happened to her was a type of what was to come. The physical healing of her body was an image of the “spiritual” healing that was to be given to many through the gift of true spiritual life in the Holy Spirit.

If the power of God was present in Jesus, why was the unclean woman not destroyed by it? There seem to be two reasons. The first had to do with the woman. She had been touched spiritually by what she had heard of Jesus. She had heard the gospel in an incomplete but still true form, and she had come to faith. She had, in other words, been changed so that she would receive the power of God through Christ and not resist it. The second reason had to do with Jesus. He was the transforming power of God come to us in a form that is not too much for us, but that is adapted to heal us – if we make contact with it in the right way.

The divinized life that the new covenant brings comes to us through union with the humanity of Christ. His humanity is a conduit that passes on the life he lives. He does not pass on human life. That we have already. Rather, he passes on the divine presence and power in the form that has shaped his own human nature and can shape ours so that our humanity can function the way it was intended to.

To use a modern analogy, Christ's humanity is like an electric socket. When an electrical cord is plugged in, it does not receive an influx of more metal from the socket. It does not become thicker or longer by receiving more of the same sort of substance it already has. Rather, the wire in the socket makes steady contact with the wire in the cord and passes on the electricity. The cord thereby becomes able to function in the same way as the socket.

Furthermore, the wire in the cord cannot receive electricity from just any socket. Plugged into the wrong source, it could be burned out or receive nothing at all. By being joined to the right source, properly adapted, in this case an electrified wire of a certain voltage, the cord receives electricity in a form that allows it to become itself electrified and to transmit electricity. To use scriptural terms, we could say that the wire in the socket passes on its own "nature". It does so by transmitting a principle or source of new functioning that can transform the wire in the cord and allow it to function in a new way.

Christ has life in the form that is needed for us to live in a new way. He passes on to us a new life that is suited and adapted to humans. He does not just give us a jolt from time to time to heal us or get us to act better. He allows us to be joined to him and in him have a source of new power that we can live from and act from in an ongoing way. To be "in Christ" is to be in the sort of personal union with him that allows that life to be communicated to us. By being united with Christ, we can pass from death to life and live the way God intended.

[Steve Clark](#) is a founder and former president of the [Sword of the Spirit](#), a noted author numerous books and articles, and a frequent speaker. This article is excerpted from the first chapter of Steve Clark's Book, *Redeemer: Understanding the Meaning of the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, copyright © 1992, 2009. Used with permission.

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Quotes from Early Church Fathers on Christ's Death and Resurrection



Abraham's Sacrifice - etching by Rembrandt

**The Lamb That Was Slain Has Delivered Us from Death
and Has Given Us Life**

from an Easter homily by Melito of Sardis

There was much proclaimed by the prophets about the mystery of the Passover: that mystery is Christ, and to him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

For the sake of suffering humanity he came down from heaven to earth, clothed himself in that humanity in the Virgin's womb, and was born a man. Having then a body capable of suffering, he took the pain of fallen man upon himself; he triumphed over the diseases of soul and body that were its cause, and by his Spirit, which was incapable of dying, he dealt man's destroyer, death, a fatal blow.

He was led forth like a lamb; he was slaughtered like a sheep. He ransomed us from our servitude to the world, as he had ransomed Israel from the hand of Egypt; he freed us from our slavery to the devil, as he had freed Israel from the hand of Pharaoh. He sealed our souls with his own Spirit, and the members of our body with his own blood.

He is the One who covered death with shame and cast the devil into mourning, as Moses cast Pharaoh into mourning. He is the One that smote sin and robbed iniquity of offspring, as Moses robbed the Egyptians of their offspring. He is the One who brought us out of slavery into freedom, out of darkness into light, out of death into life, out of tyranny into an eternal kingdom; who made us a new priesthood, a people chosen to be his own for ever. He is the Passover that is our salvation.



The Lamb of God - late 11th century mosaic, Cathedral church in Venezia, Italy

It is he who endured every kind of suffering in all those who foreshadowed him. In Abel he was slain, in Isaac bound, in Jacob exiled, in Joseph sold, in Moses exposed to die. He was sacrificed in the Passover lamb, persecuted in David, dishonored in the prophets.

It is he who was made man of the Virgin, he who was hung on the tree; it is he who was buried in the earth, raised from the dead, and taken up to the heights of heaven. He is the mute lamb, the slain lamb born of Mary, the fair ewe. He was seized from the flock, dragged off to be slaughtered, sacrificed in the evening, and buried at night. On the tree no bone of his was broken; in the earth his body knew no decay. He is the

One who rose from the dead, and who raised man from the depths of the tomb.



Melito of Sardis was bishop of Sardis (now in present day Turkey) in the second century AD and known for his pastoral approach. A letter of Polycrates of Ephesus to Victor, bishop of Rome, around 194 AD (Eusebius, *Church History* V.24) states that "Melito the eunuch whose whole walk was in the Holy Spirit" was buried at Sardis [in 180 AD]. Tertullian (c. 160-225 AD) wrote that Melito was esteemed as a prophet by many of the faithful Christians.

Melito was a prolific Christian writer, although only one sermon, entitled "On the Passover," and a few fragments of his works are preserved today. Eusebius listed most of his works and gave a few extracts in his *Church History* (IV.13, IV.26). One work which was written around 172 AD is "An Apology for the Christian Faith," an appeal to the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius to examine the accusations against the Christians and to end the persecution. Melito presented elaborate parallels between the Old Testament, the form or mold as he called it, and the New Testament which he saw as the truth that broke the mold, in a series of *Eklogai*, six books of extracts from the Law and the Prophets which pointed to Christ and the Christian faith. Eusebius also cited Melito's famous canon (official list of the books) of the Old Testament, one of the earliest known canons preserved from the early church period.

Related article > [What Happened on the Cross?](#) by John of Damascus

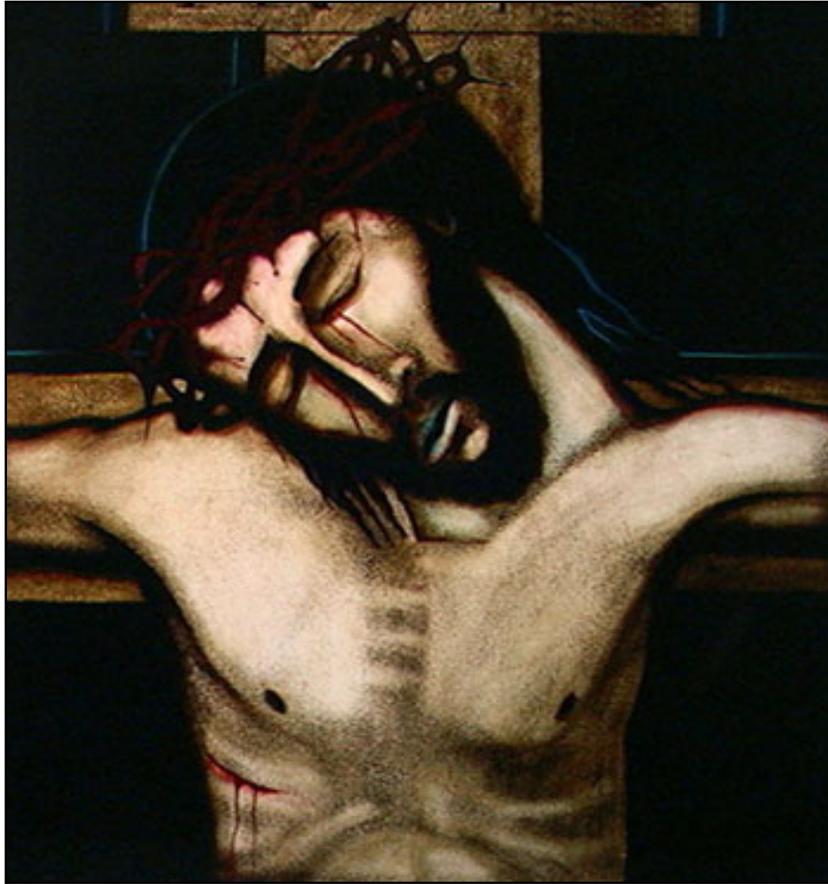
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[April 2012 - Vol. 59](#)

Quotes from Early Church Fathers on Christ's Death and Resurrection



Crucifixion by [Michael O'Brien](#)

The Cross of Christ gives life to the human race

By Ephrem of Edessa (306-373 AD)

Death trampled our Lord underfoot but he in his turn treated death as highroad for his own feet. He submitted to it, enduring it willingly, because by this means he would be able to destroy death in spite of itself. Death had its own way when our Lord went out from Jerusalem carrying his cross; but when by a loud cry from that cross he summoned the dead from the underworld, death was powerless to prevent it.

Death slew him by means of the body which he had assumed; but the same body proved to be the weapon with which he conquered death. Concealed beneath the cloak of his manhood, his godhead engaged death in combat; but in slaying our Lord, death itself was slain. It was able to kill natural human life, but was itself killed by the life that is above the nature of man.

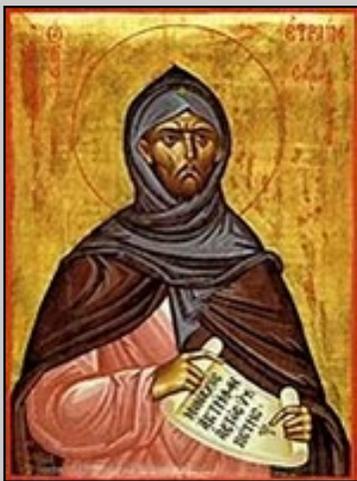
Death could not devour our Lord unless he possessed a body, neither could hell swallow him up unless he bore our flesh; and so he came in search of a chariot in which to ride to the underworld. This chariot was the body which he received from the virgin; in it he invaded death's fortress, broke open its strongroom and scattered all its treasure.

At length he came upon Eve, the mother of all the living. She was that vineyard whose enclosure her own hands had enabled death to violate, so that she could taste its fruit; thus the mother of all the living became the source of death for every living creature. But in her stead Mary grew up, a new vine in place of the old. Christ, the new life, dwelt within her. When death, with its customary impudence, came foraging for her mortal fruit, it encountered its own destruction in the hidden life that fruit contained. All unsuspecting, it swallowed him up, and in so doing released life itself and set free a multitude of men.

He who was also the carpenter's glorious son set up his cross above death's all consuming jaws, and led the human race into the dwelling place of life. Since a tree had brought about the downfall of mankind, it was upon a tree that mankind crossed over to the realm of life. Bitter was the branch that had once been grafted upon that ancient tree, but sweet the young shoot that has now been grafted in, the shoot in which we are meant to recognize the Lord whom no creature can resist.

We give glory to you, Lord, who raised up your cross to span the jaws of death like a bridge by which souls might pass from the region of the dead to the land of the living. We give glory to you who put on the body of a single mortal man and made it the source of life for every other mortal man. You are incontestably alive. Your murderers sowed your living body in the earth as farmers sow grain, but it sprang up and yielded an abundant harvest of men raised from the dead.

Come then, my brothers and sisters, let us offer our Lord the great and all-embracing sacrifice of our love, pouring out our treasury of hymns and prayers before him who offered his cross in sacrifice to God for the enrichment of us all.



Ephrem of Edessa (306-373 AD)

a brief bio by [Ormonde Platter](#)

Ephrem the Syrian (or Ephrem of Edessa), deacon, theologian, and hymn writer, died of plague on 9 June 373. Ephrem was born around the year 306 in the city of Nisibis (the modern Turkish town of Nusaybin, on the border with Syria). Internal evidence from Ephrem's hymnody suggests that both his parents were part of the growing Christian community in the city, although later hagiographers wrote that his father was a pagan priest. Numerous languages were spoken in the Nisibis of Ephrem's day, mostly dialects of Aramaic. The Christian community used the Syriac dialect. Various pagan religions, Judaism, and early Christian sects vied with one another for the

hearts and minds of the populace. It was a time of great religious and political tension. The Roman Emperor Diocletian had signed a treaty with his Persian counterpart Nerses in 298 that transferred Nisibis into Roman hands. The savage persecution and martyrdom of Christians under Diocletian were an important part of Nisibene church heritage as Ephrem grew up.

Jacob, the first bishop of Nisibis, was appointed in 308, and Ephrem grew up under his leadership of the

community. Jacob of Nisibis is recorded as a signatory at the Council of Nicaea in 325. Ephrem was baptized as a youth and almost certainly became a son of the covenant, an unusual form of Syrian proto-monasticism. Jacob appointed Ephrem as a teacher (Syriac *malpanâ*, a title that still carries great respect for Syriac Christians). He was ordained as a deacon either at his baptism or later. In his poems Ephrem refers to himself as a “herdsman” (*’alana*), a member of the shepherd-bishop's pastoral staff. At the end of his *Hymns Against the Heresies* Ephrem wrote of himself, saying:

O Lord, may the works of your herdsman (*’alana*)
not be negated.
I will not then have troubled your sheep,
but as far as I was able,
I will have kept the wolves away from them,
and I will have built, as far as I was capable,
Enclosures of teaching-hymns (*madrašê*)
for the lambs of your flock.

I will have made a disciple
of the simple and unlearned man,
And I will have given him a strong hold
on the herdsman's (*’alone*) staff,
the healers' medicine,
and the disputants' armor.

Ephrem began to compose hymns and write biblical commentaries as part of his educational office. He is popularly credited as the founder of the School of Nisibis, which in later centuries was the centre of learning of the church of the East. ...The church historian Sozomen credits Ephrem with having written over three million lines. Ephrem combines in his writing a threefold heritage: he draws on the models and methods of early Rabbinic Judaism, he engages skillfully with Greek science and philosophy, and he delights in the Mesopotamian-Persian tradition of mystery symbolism.

The most important of his works are his lyric, teaching hymns (*madrašê*). These hymns are full of rich, poetic imagery drawn from biblical sources, folk tradition, and other religions and philosophies. The *madrašê* are written in stanzas of syllabic verse, and employ over fifty different metrical schemes. Each *madrašâ* had its *qalâ*, a traditional tune identified by its opening line. All of these *qalê* are now lost. Bardaisan and Mani had composed *madrašê*, and Ephrem felt that the medium was a suitable tool to use against their claims.

The *madrašê* are gathered into various hymn cycles. Each group has a title—Carmina Nisibena, On Faith, On Paradise, On Virginity, Against Heresies—but some of these titles do not do justice to the entirety of the collection (for instance, only the first half of the Carmina Nisibena is about Nisibis). Each *madrašâ* usually had a refrain (*’ûnîtâ*), which was repeated after each stanza. Later writers have suggested that the *madrašê* were sung by all women choirs with an accompanying lyre.

Particularly influential were his *Hymns Against Heresies*. Ephrem used these to warn his flock of the heresies which threatened to divide the early church. He lamented that the faithful were “tossed to and fro and carried around with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness and deceitful wiles.” He devised hymns laden with doctrinal details to inoculate right-thinking Christians against heresies such as docetism. The *Hymns Against Heresies* employ colorful metaphors to describe the incarnation of

Christ as a fully human and divine. Ephrem asserts that Christ's unity of humanity and divinity represents peace, perfection, and salvation; in contrast, docetism and other heresies sought to divide or reduce Christ's nature, and in doing so would rend and devalue Christ's followers with their false teachings.

Ephrem also wrote verse homilies (*mêmrê*). These sermons in poetry are far fewer in number than the *madrašê*. The *mêmrê* are written in a heptosyllabic couplets (pairs of lines of seven syllables each).

The third category of Ephrem's writings is his prose work. He wrote biblical commentaries on the *Diatessaron* (the single gospel harmony of the early Syriac church), on Genesis and Exodus, and on the Acts of the Apostles and Pauline epistles. He also wrote refutations against Bardaisan, Mani, Marcion, and others. Ephrem wrote exclusively in the Syriac language, but translations of his writings exist in Armenian, Coptic, Georgian, Greek, and other languages. Some of his works are only extant in translation (particularly in Armenian).

Syriac churches still use many of Ephrem's hymns as part of the annual cycle of worship. Most of these liturgical hymns are edited and conflated versions of the originals. The most complete, critical text of authentic Ephrem was compiled between 1955 and 1979 by Dom Edmund Beck, OSB, as part of the *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium*.

> See related homily [The Lamb that was slain has given us new life](#), by Melito of Sardis

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Christ Pantocrator (Ruler of All) - mosaic, 1148 AD, dome of Cathedral of Cefalù, Palermo, Italy

The Incarnate, Crucified, and Risen Lord

by Dieterich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945)

This excerpt is from *Ethics*, the last book Bonhoeffer was working on before his execution by the Nazi regime on April 9, 1945. The unfinished work was hidden away for safety and retrieved after the war.

Bonhoeffer's friend Eberhard Bethge assembled it for publication in 1949.

In Jesus Christ we have faith in the incarnate, crucified and risen God. In the incarnation we learn of the love of God for his creation. In the crucifixion we learn of the judgment of God upon all flesh. And in the resurrection we learn of God's will for a new world. There could be no greater error than to tear these three elements apart – for each of them comprises the whole. It is quite wrong to establish a separate theology of the incarnation, a theology of the cross, or a theology of the resurrection, each in opposition to the others, by a misconceived absolutization of one of these parts. It is equally wrong to apply the same procedure to a consideration of the Christian life. A Christian ethic constructed solely on the basis of the incarnation would lead directly to the compromise solution. An ethic which was based solely on the cross or the resurrection of Jesus would fall victim to radicalism and enthusiasm. Only in the unity is the conflict resolved.

Jesus Christ the man – this means that God enters into created reality. It means that we have the right and the obligation to be men before God. The destruction of manhood, of man's quality as man (*Menschsein*), is sin, and is therefore a hindrance to God's redemption of man. Yet the manhood (*Menschsein*) of Jesus Christ does not mean simply the corroboration of the established world and of the

human character as it is. Jesus was man "without sin" (Hebrews 4.15) – that is what is decisive. Yet among men Jesus lived in the most utter poverty, unmarried, and he died as a criminal. Thus the manhood of Jesus implies already a twofold condemnation of man, the absolute condemnation of sin and the relative condemnation of the established human orders. But even under this condemnation Jesus is really man, and it is his will that we shall be men. He neither renders the human reality independent nor destroys it, but he allows it to remain as that which is before the last, as a penultimate which requires to be taken seriously in its own way, and yet not to be taken seriously, a penultimate which has become the outer covering of the ultimate.

Jesus Christ the crucified – this means that God pronounces its final condemnation on the fallen creation. The rejection of God on the cross of Jesus Christ contains within itself the rejection of the whole human race without exception. The cross of Jesus is the death sentence upon the world. Man cannot glory now in his humanity, nor the world in its divine orders. The glory of men has come now to its last end in the face of the Crucified, bruised and bloody and spat upon. Yet the crucifixion of Jesus does not simply mean the annihilation of the created world – but under this sign of death, the cross, men are now to continue to live, to their own condemnation if they despise it, but to their own salvation if they give it its due. The ultimate has become real in the cross, as the judgment upon all that is penultimate, yet also as mercy towards that penultimate which bows before the judgment of the ultimate.

Jesus Christ who rose again – this means that God out of his love and omnipotence sets an end to death and calls a new creation into life, imparts new life. "Old things are passed away" (2 Corinthians 5.17). "Behold, I make all things new" (Revelation 21.5). Already in the midst of the old world, resurrection has dawned, as a last sign of its end and of its future, and at the same time as a living reality. Jesus rose again as a man, and by so doing he gave men the gift of the resurrection. Thus man remains man, even though he is a new, a risen man, who in no way resembles the old man. Until he crosses the frontier of his death, even though he has already risen again with Christ, he remains in the world of the penultimate, the world into which Jesus entered and the world in which the cross stands. Thus, so long as the earth continues, even the resurrection does not annul the penultimate, but the eternal life, the new life, breaks in with ever greater power into the earthly life and wins its space for itself within it.

[Excerpt from *Ethics*, first published in German by Chr. Kaiser Verlag, Munich 1949. English translation by Neville Horton Smith © SCM Press Ltd London 1955.]



Dieterich Bonhoeffer was born in Breslau, Germany, one of seven children. He grew up in Berlin, where his father worked as a prominent professor of psychiatry and neurology. His mother was one of the few women of her generation to obtain a university degree. At the age of 14 he decided he would become a Lutheran pastor and theologian. He was the first of the German theologians to speak out clearly against the persecution of the Jews. He was 39 years old when he was taken out of his prison cell and hanged as a Nazi traitor on April 9, 1945. As he left his cell he said to his companion, "This is the end – but for me, the beginning of life."

photo of Bonhoeffer in the courtyard of Tegel prison, summer 1944
source: Christian Kaiser Verlag

> See related article [Cheap Grace versus Costly Grace](#) by Bonhoeffer



Jesus cleanses the temple, by El Greco

Godly Zeal

What does it mean to be a zealous Christian?

by John Keating

The burning zeal of the Lord

A key characteristic of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ was his burning zeal for the kingdom of God. His zeal complements his servant-like meekness and humility. One striking example takes place the week before Passover when the Lord Jesus makes his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. His timing is no mere coincidence, for the season of Passover held special significance for the Jews. It was popularly believed that the Messiah would come at Passover time to announce the establishment of his kingdom. And many in Jerusalem and throughout Palestine were acquainted with the itinerant preacher from Galilee. There was much speculation and discussion concerning him: Who was he? Could he be the Messiah? Would he come to the feast? When would he make his move?

Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover, to purify themselves. They were looking for Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, “What do you think? That he will not come to the feast?” (John 11:55-56).

Speculation had intensified recently because of the amazing reports coming from Bethany, a town just over the Mount of Olives to the east. Jesus had miraculously called his friend Lazarus back to life after he had been dead four days. Jerusalem was in a furor, buzzing with speculation over this latest sign, eager to see what Jesus would do when he arrived for Passover. When news came that Jesus had arrived in Bethany to spend the night with Lazarus and his sisters, it evoked an immediate response in Jerusalem. “When the great crowd of the Jews

learned that he was there, they came, not only on account of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead” (John 12:9).

The following day, Jesus set out to make his entry into Jerusalem. At Bethphage, the next town after Bethany, he halted. The law required all pilgrims to stay in Jerusalem at Passover. But the city's normal population was around 50,000 and it couldn't accommodate the 100,000 pilgrims that flooded into it during Passover. Therefore, Jerusalem's outer limits were legally expanded, and Bethphage was included. At this point, then, before entering the village, Jesus prepared very deliberately for his entry into the city of Jerusalem. He had already made arrangements for a donkey to be provided, and then he sent two disciples ahead to procure it.

And when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find an ass tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If any one says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and he will send them immediately” (Matthew 21:1-3).

To our minds, entering the city on a donkey may seem insignificant, or perhaps even a bit degrading. But at that time in Jerusalem it was a dignified and stately arrival, fitting for a king.

Let us also recall the eager expectations brewing in the minds and hearts of Jesus' followers, as well as in the hearts of many devout Jews. The time is right they think; the stage is set. Now will the kingdom of God be announced; now Jesus is marching triumphantly on Jerusalem, there to set up his royal throne. As Jesus enters the city, his own disciples and the crowd from Jerusalem go wild with exultation, greeting him with the royal title of Son of David, proclaiming him King of Israel, and quoting from the messianic Psalm 118: “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Jesus then enters Jerusalem as the royal son of David. He is very explicit about his manner of entry, for he comes in great dignity, yet not with a vast army to capture the city. Without apology he presents himself to Jerusalem and the leaders of Israel as their King. He refuses to silence the joyful proclamations made by his disciples (see Luke 19:39-40), and yet his entrance is meek and not warlike. All of this is in fulfilment of the prophecy spoken of him by Zechariah (9:9), as Matthew notes: “Tell the daughter of Zion: Behold, your king is coming to you, humble (literally, “meek”) and mounted on an ass, and on a colt, the foal of an ass” (Matthew 21:4-5).

In all these events, Jesus was declaring important truths about himself. Truly he was the Christ, the son of David; yet he was not coming in the way the Jews had expected. He would not present himself as a conquering warrior king, come to destroy the hated Roman Empire and to set up a temporal world rule in Jerusalem. Rather, he had come as the meek and humble servant king fore-told by Zechariah – in a spirit of peace. His very next action displays an important aspect of the nature of this meek and peaceful king – a bold and forceful zeal for his Father's house. Jesus enters the temple, the holiest place on the face of the earth, and aggressively drives out the money changers and merchants who have set up shop in the outer court.

And Jesus entered the temple of God and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, “It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer'; but you make it a den of robbers” (Matthew 21:12-13).

John describes Jesus' cleansing of the temple as the fulfilment of the prophetic statement in Psalm 69: “Zeal for

your house will consume me.”

According to the New Testament, Jesus manifested a strong and godly zeal in this aggressive act. He did not, as some people suggest, lose his cool, fly off the handle, or depart from his normal path of balanced, rational behavior. He was making no embarrassing mistake in a fit of anger, which he would regret later, once he regained self-control. He knew exactly what he was doing, and he chose to act in precisely the manner in which he did. Throughout his ministry, Jesus was humble and meek at the proper time. And at the proper time he was authoritative, forceful, and aggressive. He was, at one and the same time, a man of meekness and a man of zeal.

What is zeal?

As with meekness, many people labor under an inaccurate or insufficient concept of zeal. A lot of Christians tend to equate zeal with enthusiasm. Though these two are related, they are different in many respects. Enthusiasm involves an eagerness or excitement that generally contains a large emotional component. As a result, it usually comes and goes in spurts. It is difficult to sustain a continual high level of enthusiasm without a lot of undue strain and weariness. Unfortunately, those who make the mistake of equating enthusiasm with zeal can feel bound to live at an unreasonable level of emotional intensity. Or else they can feel guilty and less than zealous for failing to maintain such a level.

I've known other Christians who have succeeded in making themselves somewhat obnoxious and difficult to relate to through their misguided efforts to be “zealous.” In order to be a strong and zealous Christian, it is not necessary to wear a perpetual, “joyful,” toothy grin, to speak in pious-sounding Christian jargon, or to unleash a heavy blast of high intensity enthusiasm at everyone we encounter. In fact, it is not only unnecessary, but inadvisable and wearisome for everyone involved.

In essence, true zeal consists of a determined, aggressive dedication to something or someone. It should not come and go in a Christian's life, because it is not subject to the vagaries of the more emotion-based enthusiasm. Christian zeal is a constant feature of a strong Christian life, because it is a dedication to God founded on a fundamental decision. It's not affected by how we're feeling, what day it is, how we slept last night, or whether things are going our way. It is certainly true that enthusiasm supports our zeal for God and his kingdom, making our determined, aggressive actions easier to sustain. But our zeal should last through thick and thin, long after enthusiasm has waxed and waned, and waxed and waned again.

In scripture, both the Hebrew word *qinah* and the Greek word *zelos* can be translated into English in two related ways: “zeal” and “jealousy.” For example, in the Old Testament God's *qinah* is at times translated as God's zeal – “The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this” (Isaiah 9:7), and at other times translated as his jealousy – “I will make you stop playing the harlot, and you shall also give hire no more, so I will satisfy my fury on you, and my jealousy shall depart from you” (Ezekiel 16:41-42). Furthermore, the scripture regards zeal as a potentially good or bad thing, depending on how it is exercised and where it is directed. For instance, Paul speaks of the Jewish opponents of Christianity as possessing a zeal which misses the mark.

I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is not enlightened. For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness (Romans 10:2-3).

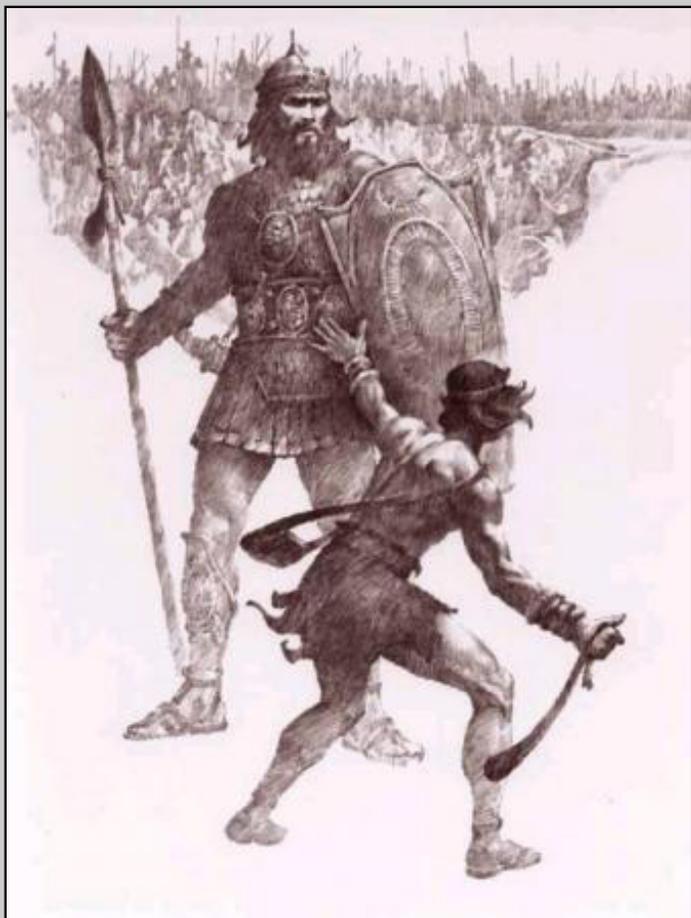
In this past century, we could certainly say that communists exhibited an impressive measure of zeal, which was seriously misdirected, thereby making them dangerous enemies of the gospel.

Examples of Godly zeal

On the other hand, true godly zeal is an attribute of all the great heroes of the faith. We have already noted the example of the Lord Jesus. Let us take a brief look at the zeal of a few other great men and women of God.

David

Earlier we noted the “hot arrogance” of Goliath of Gath. His opponent on the field of battle, the youthful David, gives us a prime example of zeal for God. Righteously angered by the boasts, threats, and blasphemies of the Philistine champion, who had dared to defy the Lord, David courageously confronted Goliath on God’s behalf.



Then David said to the Philistine, “You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin; but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down, and cut off your head; and I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord saves not with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hand.”

When the Philistine arose and came and drew near to meet David, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet the Philistine. And David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone, and slung it, and struck the Philistine on his forehead; the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground.

- 1 Samuel 17:45-49

Deborah

Burning zeal for God is not an attribute solely of men who served and fought for God. The same zealous spirit is to be seen in Deborah, who roused the faltering Barak into action to defeat the enemies of Israel (Judges 4:4-10), and Judith, whose zeal for God and her people led her to courageous action and a single-handed victory over Israel's Assyrian persecutor.



Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment. She sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you, `Go, gather your men at Mount Tabor, taking ten thousand from the tribe of Naphtali and the tribe of Zebulun. And I will draw out Sisera, the general of Jabin's army, to meet you by the river Kishon with his chariots and his troops; and I will give him into your hand.'" Barak said to her, "If you will go with me, I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go." And she said, "I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the road on which you are going will not lead to your glory, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman." Then Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh. And Barak summoned Zeb'ulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; and ten thousand men went up at his heels; and Deborah went with him.

Paul

One of the greatest examples of godly zeal is the apostle Paul. From his early years, Paul was a man of great zeal, as he himself describes in Galatians 1:13-14:

For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

Yet this zeal for the law, for the "traditions of his fathers," for God, was unenlightened as was that of many of his compatriots. For a time it led him to zealously persecute Christians. When he was struck down on the Damascus road, the course of his life was radically changed. But his zeal for God flamed on – now not only burning hotly, but enlightened by the light of Christ.

For the remainder of his life, Paul's consuming zeal for God would lead him on, constantly and unfalteringly. It was no smooth, easy path he walked, but one fraught with toil and trouble, with untold hardship and grief. Paul himself tells us how rough things were for him:

Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one – I am talking like a madman – with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure (2 Corinthians 11:23-27).

Here is a man motivated by more than mere enthusiasm. Paul's was a relentless, determined dedication of himself to God, which withstood unwaveringly all the ups and downs, the victories and defeats of the life God

assigned to him.

How do we express zeal?

Zeal is a characteristic of a loyal and true servant. A faithful vassal in the service of a great king will be zealous for the king's honor and glory, and for the accomplishment of the king's plans and wishes. So it is with us and our great King. Our Christian zeal can and should find concrete expression in daily life. Scripture gives us pointers concerning where and how this zeal might be displayed. Let us look briefly at several of them.

Zeal for God himself

Paul tells the Jews of Jerusalem in Acts 22:3 that from his youth he has been “zealous for God.” For a Jew, this zeal would be especially focused on God's law, that gracious and priceless gift given to Israel on Mount Sinai. Zeal for God includes much more, however. In our daily lives, it involves our dedication to grow in the knowledge and love of God, to draw near to him regularly in prayer, to seek out his will and do it, and to bring him glory by the way we live. In all of these things, enthusiasm and desire can play a useful part, but it is especially our zeal for God, our consistent and determined dedication to him, that will see us through – faithful to the end. Here is the starting point for zeal. Before expressing it in other ways, let us be sure that our zeal, first and foremost, is for God himself.

Zeal for the Gospel

We have already noted the zeal of the Lord Jesus and Paul in this regard. In the New Testament, Paul also uses the term explicitly in reference to one of his fellow workers, Epaphras: “For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you (literally, “that he has great zeal for you”) and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis (Colssians 4:13).

Zeal in spreading the gospel of Christ has always characterized the church's apostolic workers and missionaries, from New Testament times to the present. For instance, in the early frontier days of the United States, the Methodist circuit riders displayed remarkable zeal in their preaching of the gospel. These men often chose to remain single for the sake of their service to God, enduring such tremendous hardship and deprivation on their preaching circuits through the American wilderness that they seldom lived to be middle-aged. Their sacrificial dedication typifies the zeal of Christian missionaries down through the centuries. While few of us may be called to such radical expression of zeal for the gospel, our dedication to aid in communicating the truths of our faith to those who do not know them is a normal expression of Christian zeal. It may take the form of financially supporting those who are called to be missionaries or of extending Christian love to people at work, in our neighborhood, or in the classroom. Much of my own work with university students concerns bringing the life of Christ to young men and women who do not have it or who have lost it. Time and again the uncomplicated love of a Christian friend, reaching out in word and action, has been the key to the conversion of such a student. Many of my Christian friends have been instrumental, at work or in their neighbourhoods, in bringing others to faith – not through eloquent preaching but through consistent Christian love and the sharing of a single truth at the right time. “Normal” Christians can have a tremendous impact on friends and acquaintances when their zeal is channelled in this direction.

Zeal for good works

Paul writes to Titus that the Lord Jesus “gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds” (Titus 2:14). What kind of good deeds should we be zealous for? The range is very broad. It involves being of service “to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10). In 1 Timothy 5:10, Paul describes the following good deeds of a godly widow: “one who has brought up children, shown hospitality, washed the feet of the saints, relieved the afflicted, and devoted herself to doing good in every way.” Giving generously to supply the needs of others is

another important good deed. Paul commends the church in Corinth (2 Corinthians 9:2) for its zeal in collecting money to go to the aid of the church in Jerusalem, who were in great need.

Like the New Testament Christians, we should be zealous for every good work: generous with our time, energy, goods, and money, not so that we can feel good about ourselves or so that others will think we're wonderful, but so that we will please God and obey his commandments. A zeal for good works is not the special property of certain unusual Christians; it is not outside the scope of a normal Christian life. I can point to many Christian families that have successfully integrated this willing generosity into a very busy schedule.

For instance, one friend of mine, a prosperous Christian businessman, has raised a fine family, shown gracious hospitality in his home, had a marked impact on the lives of many around him, and given freely of his time and money to Christian work, while effectively heading his own business. His demanding daily routine has in no way extinguished his zeal for good works.

Zeal in defence of the faith

Zeal in defence of the faith – of righteousness and truth – has characterized God's people since the first days of their covenant relationship with him. In Exodus 32:25-29, just after Moses descended from the mountain with the tablets of stone, the zeal of the sons of Levi broke out upon those worshipping the golden calf, cutting off idolatry – perhaps the greatest threat to the faith of Israel. Later, when idolatry, this time to the Baal of Peor, again threatened Israel, the zeal of Aaron's grandson Phinehas in punishing the guilty won him God's favor and averted the plague which was sweeping through the people due to God's wrath (Nm 25:6-13). David's zeal in his battle with Goliath and the zeal of Deborah – examples noted earlier – were expressions of godly zeal in defence of the faith, too. This type of zeal is carried over into the New Testament – in the Lord Jesus himself, then in Peter, John, Paul, Stephen, and others.

Our challenge today

Zeal should characterize us, also. As Peter says: “Always be prepared to make a defence to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). As we noted earlier, this defence of the faith, zealous as it is, must also be blended with meekness, if we are to act in the spirit of the Lord. But true meekness will not prevent us from taking a firm stand for the truth and against wrongdoing. It will not keep us from speaking out in protest when the Christian faith is mocked and derided. At times, such a stand may be unappreciated and unwelcome, and it may cost us – in popularity, position, or even health and safety. Whatever the cost, it is a price worth paying for so great a treasure as the truth of Christ.

One friend of mine recently faced an occasion for expressing his zeal for Christian righteousness. His boss presented him with new profit-making policies that clearly required dishonest and decep-tive dealings with others. “We can't do this,” said my friend. “This is just plain wrong.” His boss warned him that failure to comply could cost him his job. My friend's rejoinder was that some things were more important to him than his job. As a Christian, he would not be party to underhand and unethical business dealings. Because my friend was such a good manager, his boss decided to reverse the new policies in order to keep him. Many times, however, taking a stand for the truth is a much more expensive proposition. Christian zeal counts the cost and takes the stand.

Christian zeal has many facets. While we have looked at several major ones, the possibilities have by no means been exhausted. However, we have seen enough to recognize that the quality of zeal, which Scripture so often attributes to God, is essential equipment for those who would be like him. Zeal should epitomize the character of a Christian servant as does meekness and humility, and it is vital to the full expression of servanthood in the Christian life. It adds an important dimension to our character, one that is so apparent in the life of Jesus. Our aim should be that the words of Psalm 69 will apply to us as they did to Jesus himself: “Zeal for your house will

consume me.”

[This article is adapted from the book [Strength Under Control: Meekness and Zeal](#), by John Keating, first edition by Servant Publications in 1981, second edition by [Kairos Publications](#) 2011. Used with permission.]



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publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom

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“I Will Build You a House”

We think small, but God thinks big

by Dave Hughes

King David's accomplishments

In the Seventh chapter of the Second Book of Samuel we find a fascinating interchange between King David and the Lord. It's an interchange that speaks to a question – the question of our roles as sons and daughters of God and God's role as Father – that is timely for our age.

The passage opens with David having achieved a certain level of accomplishment. We might say that David has “arrived”:

After the king (David) was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him... (2 Samuel 7:1).

David is settled, David is at rest. We see him here at the culmination of a 10- to 15-year struggle to work through a challenging leadership succession from Saul to himself. He has had to battle to consolidate his kingdom, to subdue enemies both external and internal. He has demonstrated mastery of military affairs, political and executive leadership, charismatic visioning and getting people to follow him. The guy is even good at writing songs! David has arrived.

A classic turning of the tables

With this position of human confidence, David decides it is time to do something for God. He even gets his local religious adviser to sanction the work. It's important to note that David took the initiative here, he was not responding to direction from God.

David said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the Ark of God remains in a tent." Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you."

But God had other plans:

That night, the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying: "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, 'Why have you not built me a house of cedar?'"

"Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth'..."

The Lord declares to *you* that the Lord will establish a house *for you*....

This is a classic turning of the tables. God sets David straight on the order of the relationship. He says to David in effect: You want to build a house for me? Thanks but that's not the way it works. I am building a house for you.

God enlightens David's desire

What can we see in this exchange? The first thing we need to see: This is not a rebuke, this is revelation. God is not angry with David, in fact I think he is delighted with him.

He made him this way – men love to build things, we are wired to build things. Several years ago we put a major addition on our home. I enjoyed every minute of it – working with the architect to lay out the plans, coming home every day to check the construction, smelling the new wood. Men are wired to build things, it's in our nature. So God is not rebuking David for his desire to build. But he is saying to David: thanks, I appreciate your heart, your desire to build something for me. But let me show you the way this really works, what's really going on here: I am building you a house.

He does not step on David's desire, he enlightens it: thank you for your offer, but let me reveal to you the deeper truths.

Where David needs God's revelation

I see two areas where David needs revelation. First, David misses the fundamental nature of the relationship – God does not want people to do things for him, to build things for him. God is a father who wants to do things for his sons.

Natural man comes to God with a transactional mentality – I will do this for you, and I want you to do X for me. You could fill in the X any number of ways: bless me with prosperity, give me peace, don't destroy me, etc.

But God does not need us to do things for him. Psalm 50: “I have no need of a bull from your stall...I own the cattle on a thousand hills.” From Acts 17, Paul in Athens says, “The God who made the world and everything in it.... does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything.”

I see David approaching God with this kind of transactional thinking. David hasn't quite “got it” yet. There is a transaction taking place but it is a transaction from the Father to his son. God is building him a house, not the other way around. David needs revelation to understand the true nature of the relationship.

The second way that David needs revelation is in seeing the full scope of God's action – what God is doing is much bigger in scope and nature than David can see or conceive.

David wants to build in cedar, God wants to build with souls. David is thinking of dead stones, God is thinking of a living temple of endless praise.

Where we need God's revelation

We see this all the time in how God works with men and women. We see things on one plane, he operates on another plane. From the encounter of Jesus with the woman at the well: she is thinking about a bucket, God wants to give her a river. We talk about giving our hearts to God, he says, “No, let me give my heart to you.” God's scope and plans are exponentially bigger than we can conceive.

This reminds me of Hughes' rule for home maintenance. Whenever I am doing a chore at home, I sit down to calculate how long this chore should take. Then I double the estimate and change the units. For example, if I calculate that a chore should normally take two minutes, my experience tells me it will really be four hours. Similarly a three hour chore becomes six days. Unfortunately I've found this to be a pretty accurate system of estimating.

This is how it is with God's scope – imagine what God is doing then double it and change the units. His scope is bigger, his plans are bigger, his view is bigger: David, don't think about cedar houses, think about living temples.

David's response to God's revelation

So how does David respond to this revelation of the order of relationship and the scope of what God is about? I find this fascinating: the Scripture says David goes in and *sits down* before the Lord.

Then King David went in and **sat down** before the Lord, and he said: “Who am I, O sovereign Lord, and what is my family that you have brought me thus far? And as if this were not enough in your sight O sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. **Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O sovereign Lord?**”

On the surface this may not seem that astounding, but in the culture of that day you didn't sit down in the presence of a superior. Every good Jew would know that one stands to worship in the presence of the Lord. There were no pews in the holy of holies, no places to sit down.

So why does David sit down in the presence of the Lord? Is this the beginning of a new informality in worship, a new breakthrough in worship freedom? Is David taking advantage of his new understanding of sonship? I can just come on in and make myself at home?

No, I think he sat down because he could no longer stand. He was floored. His knees buckled with the enormity of revelation – I had it all wrong, God is building me a house and it is a house of much greater import than I could have ever imagined.

Then he asks this question at the end, and you have to love it: is this the way you normally deal with a man? I come in with a proposal to build you a house, you turn the tables on me, you blow my mind in size and scope. Is this your normal way of working with a man?

God is relational, not transactional

So how might this passage, this encounter, this apply to us?

First I think we need to see that we often have the same tendency as David – we often decide we want to build something for God. Like David, we too have achieved, can have arrived at a place of human confidence and decide it is time to do something for God. Our approach to God and our desire to serve him are always mixed with the human tendency to perform a transaction. We are never so pure, so spiritual, that we escape the human tendency to want to perform a transaction with God. I'll do this for God, he will do X for me, whatever X may be for us. This may be unconscious, we may not admit to it, but it's often there. We need to see that God is relational, not transactional, and that the primary thrust of the relationship is his desire to provide for us as his children.

Second, like David, God does not rebuke us but wants to reveal the deeper things. You want to build me something, thanks but you've got it wrong – I am building you a house.

I am your father and I will provide. I think God wants to say to each of us – I am building you a house. It's a very personal word: I see you and know you and am building a house for you to dwell in. For our families, our children – I am building a place for them to dwell. For our communities and those we care for – I am building a place for them to dwell.

Thirdly, I think we also miss the scope of what he is about:

We think small, he thinks big.

We think buckets, he thinks rivers.

We think about our children, he thinks generations upon generations.

We think about our local community, he thinks of a massive bulwark, a cosmic web of relationships stretching through eternity.

We also need to see that it's OK that we don't "get it," that we miss the scope and miss the relationship. God is used to it. Do we think David "got it" even after this revelation? I don't think he really understood the total scope. He saw a glimmer, and that glimmer was enough to floor him.

Our response to God's work in our midst

Finally, we confront the question: Is this the way you normally deal with a man or woman? Yes, I think this is exactly how God deals with human beings. We bring our puny human offerings, shot through with mixed desires and tainted with human pride and ego, and he turns the tables and says, thanks but let me show you the house I am building for you.

So what is our response? Like David we need to be stunned as we consider his work and the privilege of serving him. Our knees need to buckle so that we are forced to sit down before him and say: Who am I that I should be so

favored?

God is building us a house, brothers and sisters. Let's go into that house and worship him.



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Andy on the Detroit soccer field holding up an xray of his dislocated elbow

Dislocation

by Andy Jordan

A story

It was early June 2011 and there were 10 of us in the room from 5 different countries having a serious conversation about a shepherd. Jaci began to share about something she had once heard: When a lamb runs away from the flock the shepherd hunts after it to find it. When he does, he brings it back to the flock and breaks its leg. Sounds horrible but the shepherd then carries the lamb until its leg heals. In this way the lamb learns the shepherd's voice and it knows where it will get food. The lamb doesn't run away again after that. Seeing how the Lord had broken me away from my family and from many comforts of home since I had moved to Detroit the previous August I found this analogy fascinating. How something costly and painful had yielded such grace in those 9 months.

10 days later – 2 days before starting what I saw as my biggest and most important job of the year – I lay in a

hospital bed with a dislocated elbow. Analogies sometimes don't make things clear enough.



An adventure

It excited me to do a gap year. My 5 older brothers had already travelled the world so in August 2010 I broke myself away from the comforts of home and everything that was familiar to me when I was growing up, and left for my adventure. I love Detroit. It has had a place in my heart since I spent a life-changing summer there in 2007 as part of the Detroit Summer Outreach program. I couldn't wait to get back.

There are many impressions that people have of Detroit. Some are true, some are ill-informed and some are not-so true. The description I use most often is that of Detroit's train station – a hauntingly beautiful piece of architecture. A sadness surrounds what must have once been a magnificent building. Now, with every window smashed and every entrance boarded up, it stands morose against the south-western skyline. It was in front of this building that I spent many hours last year contemplating the work I was doing and the people I loved, puzzled somewhat by what attracted me to it. Then in spring I understood, as the shoots of green flowered in the broken windows. Man had made it and man had destroyed it. Yet life was here. A shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse. The light shines brighter when its surroundings are darker.

A sinner

The summer of 2010, before I left for Detroit, was a turbulent one, spiritually, for me. On the face of things I had it together. I had just become an 'affiliate' with the Servants of the Word, a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord, and I was wrapping up my service with University Christian Outreach (UCO) in Glasgow and in my local church. I had worked hard on these things as well as investing time in a household and our community, but I was also working long hours on my studies. My studies took priority in my life during those few months, and my prayers became formalities and were often empty. My hunger for God was not there and I gave temptation a window. Within six weeks of finishing university I had fallen into some of the worst sin of my life. I spoke to three different men about it. They roundly agreed that I was a sinner but each in his own way simply directed me to Jesus. I spent a week in July praying and fasting. I read Psalm 51 constantly.



A loved sinner

So I was grateful to get to Detroit and start again. And it didn't take long to fall back in love with this city. I worked for Youth-Works Detroit and I lived with the Servants of the Word in their Detroit household. Within these I was given a variety of responsibilities – working on our after-school programs and in the high school youth group, helping run retreats, visiting a homeless shelter and attending alcoholics anonymous meetings at the shelter. After a while I got to make lunches and take them to the homeless people who live in abandoned houses. I was helping a saintly nun named Sister Judie Ann. I was also lucky enough to clean the Servants of the Word brothers' house and cook their dinners for them. Although I admit to a hint of sarcasm, cooking became a time where I could quietly consider my life, and it was genuinely an honor to play a not-so-insubstantial role in the days of men for whom I had huge respect.

I had inherited an iPod from my brother Dave. He had left an audio talk from a priest called Fr Jeff Huard. As I was listening to the talk, Fr. Jeff made a simple remark that struck me. “Were we anticipating this? That day to day, the preparation to make the ordinary very extraordinary is possible because we put love there.” There is a way to tackle the extraordinary problems of a suffering city and quite ordinary people are doing it in Detroit in a quite ordinary way. Ed would smile at every person he met, Doc would say thanks for every meal I cooked. Mark would start a conversation with anyone he came across. Josh was constantly attentive to how people were feeling. Dan and Priscilla would share their food, and Josh and Yvette would share their home. Sister Judie would thank God incessantly for people who gave time and money to help her take sandwiches and clothes to her friends – the “treasures of the street.” All of these men and women spoke directly and indirectly to me of Christ and his love. Kindness and compassion was leading me back. In a city plagued with brokenness, the small extraordinary acts of love whispered healing to the wounded. And were my wounds in any less need of healing? I encountered a culture of love that made it impossible not to do my utmost to reciprocate.

A family

During my summer in Detroit in 2007 I had worked with 2 brothers named Antoine and Deshawn. It happened that their younger sister, Sequoya, had been involved in our Youth-Works program. Sarah, who was in charge of the girls youth group, had been working with Sequoya. So in 2010 I began to join Sarah in visiting the home of these kids and their mom. It was so good to see them again after more than 3 years absence and the first night was hilarious. I looked up photos on my facebook of our team in 2007 and the next photo happened to be myself at a wedding

wearing a kilt. This drew some extremely personal questions about what I wear with a kilt, which I dutifully refused to answer. We had quite a laugh about a number of subjects. The mother, Robin, does not have much of a filter for words. We stayed for nearly two hours. The next time we went we started to talk, for a short time, about some real issues that the family faced. Then the next time we talked in more detail about these. Soon we began to visit precisely because there was something we all needed to talk about. If you were to list serious issues that a family might face your list would probably be shorter than the list of issues that this family had encountered. I developed a very close relationship with Deshawn and I began to take him out for lunch now and again.

An aside

There is a tendency of the devil to create cycles. Cycles where one sin breeds another and that one breeds another, until this sin returns to the original sin. Cycles where hopeless situations breed hopeless people. And we expect them too. But Christian hope is hope that the sun will rise. The devil plans to shut out this hope so that we remain in darkness, remain in the night. He is the thief that comes to steal and kill and destroy (John 10:10a). Yet the Son rising is a game-changer. It defines Christians and it defines the battle we fight. For he lives and that life is the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

To return to last June

I sat in the Coney Island restaurant at 11am on Friday with Deshawn and with my arm in a sling 6 days after dislocating it. There was fibreglass in front of the cash register to prevent armed robberies, there were four men in a car in the parking lot smoking dope and I was definitely the only white kid in sight. Deshawn unloaded his most challenging stories, yet and I guess what I did was try to play the Dad. My cry went up to God. It was almost more than I could bear. Where were the comforts of home? Where were the simple pleasures I once enjoyed, and could I even go back to them after all this? The simple fact, however, was that I had the chance to be a man who stood by Deshawn shoulder to shoulder when no-one else was standing with him. We ate and then returned to the house to try and sort things out with his mom. This conversation turned into a shouting match, though and I left arranging to meet Deshawn next week, thoroughly unconvinced that I had been of any help. As I drove away I just pleaded with God to break the cycle that Deshawn was caught in and I asked, not for the first time that week, why I had to break my arm now. No answer.



I worked throughout the summer on our Street Team Leadership Program. I led one of the crews and after a few weeks of working, I think I understood something of God's hand in it. Due to my dislocated arm, I physically

couldn't lead by example, which changed my style. Women came to drive for my crew, which pierced my pride. And I had to try writing with my left hand, which made me feel like I was 5 years old again. Yet there has been no other 6 weeks of my life where I have had more important conversations. I was able to be present to people and I became more observant of other people's needs than I have ever been. God used me in ways I would never have forseen. The guys on my crew respected me and they talked to me about personal stuff in their lives. I wished I could have played basketball with them but this was how God had it, and if I hadn't have dislocated my elbow then they would never have nicknamed me "Andycapped." If it had just been for this, then it would have been enough for me, or it would have been more than I really deserved. But on Monday 25th July Ed Conlin played a song called "Purify My Heart" during our household morning prayer time. When Ed sings out in prayer, he often gets inspired to sing charismatically in the Spirit – singing in the gift of tongues and letting God form the words. I began to sing out the words "purify me heart, cleanse me from my sin, wash me from my iniquity." I then realized I had slipped into singing the 51st psalm and so I picked up my psalm book and turned to it and sang it word for word.

"Fill me with joy and gladness;
Let the bones which you have broken rejoice."

- Psalm 51:8

I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I could barely contain shouting out "I knew it was you that broke it!" It was clear, the Lord had brought me back to him. The shepherd had carried me back to the flock. I pieced together the journey he had taken me on since the previous July when I had earnestly prayed this psalm. I began to notice all the places that the Lord spoke to me of being a shepherd (a prayer I wrote in 2005, Psalm 23, Isaiah 40:11, John 10:11, and a song one of my brothers wrote, the mosaic of the shepherd in my church that I loved, the painting in our living room in Detroit, and through Jaci's story and my dislocated arm). The shepherd's voice was undeniable in it all. I knew where I would find food, and because he took me back to Psalm 51 I knew that he had heard my prayers the previous summer. I knew I was forgiven. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me.

So with one week left before I returned home, I stood amazed by the love the Father had shown me as he brought me back to himself. But the Lord wasn't finished with me.

Friday the 29th July

Josh, the director of Youth-Works Detroit, told a story from the second book of Samuel. The Philistines had taken Bethlehem and David was thirsty. "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem." Three mighty men break through enemy lines just to get him this drink. David is in awe of their sacrifice and declares himself unworthy of it. As Josh talked, tears began to well up in my eyes. The last time I had heard this passage was one week before I had come to Detroit. My brother Steve had shared it as a sense for me just after a prayer time. With tears rolling down his face he told me that I was going to the city that Jesus loved. When I tried to read it over I couldn't find the passage and so with the busy-ness of leaving for a year, the next time I heard it was at the end of my gap year. I realised that in that year I had fought behind enemy lines. I had stood in the middle of the devil's cycles and Christ had been with me.

That afternoon I got a call to say Deshawn was at our office looking for me. This was strange and I was troubled as to what it might mean. I went immediately and found him bruised and battered. Fighting within his family had reached its peak, and tensions had finally boiled over. We chatted and we prayed and we agreed that this was breaking point and he had to finally step up and be a man. He had to take responsibility now. And so Deshawn prayed "Jesus I'm broken and I need you to fix me, 'cause I can't do it." A prayer from the heart: A plea to the Father he longed to know. I believe God always answers that prayer and in hindsight I believe I will see the fruit in Deshawn's life. But at that moment I cried "Why God? Why now? Four days before I go home?"

An answer

I couldn't have dealt with this hurt until I had been healed. And the physical healing explained the inner healing God was working. God didn't need me to fight for him in Detroit but he asked me to. And it was fighting behind enemy lines that showed me who was carrying me and where I would find food and that was what healed me. So when another wounded person cried out to God I could be there with him. We stood shoulder to shoulder. His cry – My cry. I think I will finish with an excerpt from something I wrote when I came home to Glasgow in August:

“The battle was never mine anyway. It was the Lord's but he asked me to fight for him, and I did. And after the laughs and after the tears, it all came down to me standing before the Lord with a glass of water offering it back to him. Broken by what it had cost me. ‘Here it is Lord, it's not much but it's what you asked of me.’

“The Lord said ‘Thank you.’”

Words of a man who loved me. Words of a man delighted to have me in his army. Words of a man who took nails for me. All I could think was “I'm not worthy to fight for you but you have placed me behind enemy lines and honored me. But all glory and honor is yours. What a privilege it was to fight for you. My King. My Captain. My Lord.

“You increased my faith and you spoke long of hope. But at the end, it was all to say this – I love you.

“My cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”



Andy (center) with Deshawn (2nd from left) and his family - Antoine, Sequoya, their mom Robin, and Sarah Nilles.

> See related Kairos Media [music video of Chris Parrish and Andy Jordan](#) from Youthworks Detroit performing a song for the 2011 YES retreat.



Finding the Key to Happiness

by Rachael Nevinger

[Rachael Nevinger grew up in the northern Michigan town of Traverse City, Michigan, USA. During middle school, her father's Army Reserve unit was sent to Afghanistan. When he returned from his tour, he decided to go into the Army full time. Their family was sent to Germany, just in time for Rachael to begin high school.]

As a self-focused teenager, I was very angry that I had to make this huge change and move to Germany. My only two friends on the Army base were two brothers, who turned out to be Mormons. I went with them to church a few times, but I didn't know the difference between their beliefs and mainstream Christianity.

My family did not go to church when I was growing up. My dad had a Pentecostal upbringing and told me once about speaking in tongues and experiences with the Holy Spirit he had had as a youth. I thought he was making it up, so he never mentioned it again. My mom was deeply distrustful of "organized religion" of any kind, so I had no Christian instruction and little understanding of Jesus Christ. But, I thought I was a Christian, sort of.

I came to Michigan State University (MSU) in East Lansing, Michigan, after returning from Germany and an awful senior year of high school. I had lost what faith I previously had and was just an angry kid. I had no intention of joining anything Christian at MSU but I thought it would be good to get involved in something. So, I went to "Sparticipation" on campus – an all-day event for freshmen where campus organizations have booths and tell about their activities. Alex, the University Christian Outreach (UCO) chapter director, stood out among all the people

there. I still had no intention of going to this Christian group but Alex took my email address and said he would be letting me know what was coming up with UCO.



Rachael and team at a UCO bowling tournament

For some reason, I couldn't stop thinking about UCO. At first, I ignored the emails Alex sent, but UCO stayed on my mind and it bugged me so much I decided to go to a meeting.

I was freaked out by the praying out loud and spiritual gifts. I left thinking, "OK, that was really weird but everyone was really nice to me." I went again and it seemed slightly less weird, maybe because I knew what to expect. They also talked up a retreat they were having called Fan into Flame, where people could learn about the Holy Spirit and receive prayer. I had no intention of going until a girl stood up at the meeting and spoke about what a change the retreat had made in her life.

So I went, kind of grumpy about paying the money (my parents were not about to give me money for some crazy retreat). Then I got stuck in a small group of women students – not my comfort zone. But my leader was pretty amazing – she explained things like praying in tongues and other spiritual gifts. Then it seemed OK – it reminded me of my Dad's stories.

The retreat was awesome. I had what I would call three "layers" of issues that needed to be peeled away after my difficult experience while living on the base in Germany, which had scarred me badly. First, I needed to really know that God would forgive me. During evening snack, I broke down crying from guilt. Christina, my group leader, grabbed two other staff women and they prayed with me and asked the Lord to baptize me in the Holy Spirit. Christina had a sense that God wanted to give me the gift of tongues as a personal sign of his love, and it happened! That was the highlight of my year. I experienced God's love and forgiveness.



The next couple of layers (believing that people would forgive me and then forgiving myself) were dealt with as the year went on. Seeing that people in UCO loved me no matter what was huge for me.

After Christmas break, I went to the UCO/Kairos Winter Conference. It was wonderful – all my friends were there, and the worship was great, but I wasn't expecting anything special to happen. When we split into separate men's and women's sessions, we talked about purity. I realized that I knew God forgave me for my past, these people forgave me, but I couldn't forgive myself!

I talked with Ginny, one of the senior staff members, and she told me that I needed to accept what Jesus had done in my life; otherwise, I was just throwing his forgiveness back at him. This really changed me.

When I returned to MSU from the conference, I really threw myself into UCO. I moved into the dorm where the women's dorm household was, and I became part of a small group where I could share my life and receive prayer and support. I also started serving in UCO by organizing events.

I LOVE UCO! When I look around at a prayer meeting, I see all these people I love and who love me, while knowing deep inside God's love for all of us. For a long time, I thought that the key to happiness was having a great job and living in the biggest house possible. I am not living in a glamorous place and I don't have any money, but I have friends, I have Jesus, and I am finally truly happy.

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I Will Awake the Dawn

song and music by Ed Conlin

Awake, O harp and lyre, awake the morning!
First light of day descends to lift my soul.
Your presence greets me,
stirs me to seek Thee;
I come to do Your will.

*Open my lips oh Lord,
my mouth shall sing Your praise,
Open my eyes to see Your hand this day!
My heart is steadfast, for Lord Your love is steadfast,
I will awake the dawn.*

In You my soul takes refuge, Your wings protect me,
You come from Heaven and You rout my foe.
I cry to You Lord, I am delivered,
I praise Your faithfulness!

I will give thanks to You Lord,
among the peoples,
Among the nations I'll sing praise to You;

O be exalted, highly exalted,
Your glory to the skies!

Click [here](#) to listen to an mp3 [audio clip](#) of the song

song and words: Ed Conlin

vocalists: Stevie Jordan, Ellen Karagoulis, and Susan
Dick

Album title: [Overwhelmed](#)

Produced by [Detroit Summer Outreach](#) and released in
December 2010

Ed reflects on the song

“I Will Awake the Dawn” is based on Psalm 108. I got the inspiration for the song during an early morning time of common prayer with the Servants of the Word brothers in our Detroit household. I remember the morning well. It was a heavy foggy summer morning. We all knew that we had before us a hot, hard day of work. We were all involved in the Detroit Summer Outreach program. Soon we would be joining others for our outreach project of the day as well as some street work with homeless addicts.

As we chanted Psalm 108, I particularly sensed that God wanted to fill us with his joy for this new day of service for him. During a time of spontaneous praise I began to sing out the words of the song, and the tune flowed from there. The brothers joined in, singing along with the refrain. They helped me develop the song and got me to lower the key some since I tend to sing far too high for them – especially in the early morning when our voices are groggy. Though the song remains higher than comfortable for most people for morning prayer, I feel it brings a lightness and joy to the early morning time of prayer together.

I particularly also love the chorus as it opens with the Servants of the Word dawn prayer we say each morning as we wake...“O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall declare your praise!”



Ed Conlin is a member of the [Servants of the Word](#), a missionary brotherhood of men living single for the Lord. He lives in community in the inner city of Detroit, Michigan, USA, and works as a licensed substance abuse counselor and chaplain with Capuchin Franciscan Ministries in Detroit.



Road to Emmaus

painting by John Dunne

John Dunne is a noted Irish painter. He and his wife are members of [Nazareth Community](#) in Dublin, Ireland.

John explains the theme of his work, *Road to Emmaus*: "I have attempted to get the viewer to ask a particular question – What effect the meeting of a stranger can have on us? We know the events that followed the meeting of the two disciples on that road, but they did not recognize the Christ until he broke the bread with them (Luke 24:13-35). Most of the works by other artists on this theme show this moment of the breaking of the bread. This is my attempt to take a fresh view of this wonderful event."



Throughout his career as an accomplished artist, John has traveled in many countries. He has absorbed influences from the Far East and the Mediterranean. His interests include theology and its relationship to art. He has a degree in theology. For many years he has worked on different themes which are based in literature. Two examples are childrens' games played in Dublin during his childhood and the great legends of the Irish hero Cuchulain, interpreted by the Irish poet Thomas Kinsilla. Major exhibitions have included a series of paintings on the "Song of Songs," a series of ten large



paintings based on the poem "Dream of Gerontius" by John Henry Newman, and a series of seven paintings based on the last seven words of Jesus on the cross.

> See related page • [The Seven Last Words of Jesus: paintings and reflections](#) by John Dunne

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April 2012 - Vol. 59



The Triumph of the Cross: “The Lord has risen indeed”

by Jeanne Kun

When Death and Life contended,
the Lord of life was slain.
A battle strangely ended:
he won, and lives to reign.

— Easter Sequence, *Victimae Paschali Laudes*.

Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). The key to understanding Jesus’ mission to save and restore humanity to union with the Father is found in this question and the explanation Jesus gave to his bewildered followers. As he opened the Scriptures to them (24:27), he showed that it was by his crucifixion that he fulfilled his Father’s plan for the salvation of the world. Christians can now look upon the cross not as a shameful instrument of torture but as a sign of victory. Jesus’ crucifixion was a battle that ultimately delivered all humankind from the power of Satan – from sin and from death. And we, who are in Christ, share in this victory.

Jesus went to his death on Golgotha knowing that it was the path to his glorification as well as our salvation.

Luke 24:13-47

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, 14 and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. 15 While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, 16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.

17 And he said to them, “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?” They stood still, looking sad. 18 Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?” 19 He asked them, “What things?”

They replied, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, 20 and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 21 But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. 22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 23 and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.”

25 Then he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! 26 Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” 27 Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he

Jesus went to his death on Golgotha knowing that it was the path to his glorification as well as our salvation. In his last public discourse, he had indicated how – and why – he would soon die, saying, “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name. . . . And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:27-28, 32-33). And on the very eve of his crucifixion, Jesus prayed,

Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. (John 17:1-5).

The Fathers of the Church even refer to the cross as Jesus’ “throne of glory.” The crucifixion led ultimately to Jesus’ resurrection and ascension into heaven, where he is gloriously enthroned at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 1:3).

Jesus showed his followers the wounds in his hands and feet and side to assure them that his resurrected body was the same body that had been crucified (Luke 24:39-40; John 20:27). As the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains, “[Jesus’] authentic, real body possesses the new properties of a glorious body: not limited by space and time but able to be present how and when he wills; for Christ’s humanity can no longer be confined to earth and belongs henceforth only to the Father’s divine realm” (645). When death entered the world through sin, we lost sight of our immortality and our heavenly destiny. But, because of Christ’s passion and glorification, we can anticipate with joy that, after death, our own perishable, physical bodies will be raised up and vested with unimaginable splendor. And even now, “he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to [our] mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in [us]” (Romans 8:11). Day by day the risen Lord brings healing, freedom, and transformation to us and produces the fruits of the Spirit in us; ultimately, in our imperishable bodies, we will share eternal glory with Jesus and the Father in heaven.

It is awesome to realize that Jesus retains the marks of his wounds on his resurrected body. They are a badge of his sufferings, like the battle scars proudly worn by a veteran. As

interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 29 But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.” So he went in to stay with them.

30 When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 32 They said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?”

33 That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying, “The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!” 35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

36 While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 37 They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. 38 He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate in their presence.

44 Then he said to them, “These are my

Pope Benedict XVI has noted, “The Lord took his wounds with him to eternity. He is a wounded God. . . . His wounds are a sign for us that he understands and allows himself to be wounded out of love for us.” The scars of Jesus’ crucifixion are the sign of the price he willingly paid with his own body for our redemption, the mark of his passionate love for us.

When the risen Lord appeared to the eleven, he told them: “‘Everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, ‘Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead’” (Luke 24:44-46). From its earliest days the Christian church recognized the significance of Christ’s fulfillment of prophecy; its faith in Jesus the Messiah was rooted in God’s word. As St. Paul attested, “I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Reflect!

1. 1. When we say the Apostles’ Creed, we proclaim our faith in Jesus’ resurrection and “in the resurrection of the body”—that is, in our own future resurrection. Although we cannot comprehend now how our bodies of flesh will be transformed, we know that “the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. . . . When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’” (1 Corinthians 15:52, 54).

How do you show respect for your physical body, which is destined for immortality? How might reflection on your own future resurrected body affect what you do in daily life?

2. Read and reflect on the following Scripture passages to deepen your appreciation of the victorious nature of Christ’s resurrection and the eternal life that the faithful will come to share with him in heaven:

A week later [Jesus’] disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands.

words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,⁴⁶ and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Understand!

1. Luke reports that Cleopas and his companion failed to recognize Jesus when he joined them on the road (24:16). What do you think might account for this failure? Do you think the appearance of Jesus’ resurrected body was a factor? Why or why not?

2. How did the two travelers describe Jesus of Nazareth to their unknown companion (Luke 24:19-24)? What were their beliefs about Jesus and their expectations of him before he had been crucified? Why were they so disappointed? Why do you think the two were so “slow of heart” (24:25) to believe?

3. What did Jesus stress in his explanation of the Scriptures concerning himself to his followers (Luke 24:25-27, 44-46)? What does this indicate to you about how the early church viewed the ancient prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures as it formed its understanding of Christ?

4. How did the travelers react to Jesus? Describe the process of their recognition of Jesus and the effect of his explanation of the Scriptures upon them. What does this suggest to you about the power of the word of God? About Jesus’ physical appearance? About his spiritual “presence” and charisma?

Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:26-28)

Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:12-22)

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18)

5. Since his death on the cross, how has Jesus drawn all people to himself, as he promised (John 12:28)? How is this connected to his glorification?

In the Spotlight Witness of the Early Church



If you would understand that the cross is Christ’s triumph, hear what he himself also said: “When I am lifted up, then I will draw all men to myself.” Now you can see that the cross is Christ’s glory and triumph.

– Andrew of Crete

No one, however weak, is denied a share in the victory of the cross. No one is beyond the help of the prayer of Christ. His prayer brought benefit to the multitude that raged against him. How much more does it bring to those who turn to him in repentance.

– Leo the Great

Glory be to you, O Christ, who laid your cross as a bridge over death, that souls might pass over it from the dwelling of the dead to the dwelling of life!

– Ephrem of Syria

Grow!

1. Like the two disciples on the road to

In the Spotlight

So Must the Son of Man Be Lifted Up

In his nighttime conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:1-15), Jesus prophetically alluded to his “lifting up” and glorification on the cross: “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (3:14-15). The story of the Israelites’ rebellion against God in Numbers 21:5-9 gives us insight into how we are to understand Jesus’ mysterious statement:

The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

The bronze serpent is a “type” or prefigurement of Christ. By looking at the image erected on the pole by Moses, those who had sinned and been bitten by the venomous serpents were cured. Jesus compares this incident with his coming crucifixion to show the purpose of his being raised up on the cross: Anyone who looks on him with faith can obtain salvation, for the cross is God’s remedy or antidote for the sting of Satan and the poisonous venom of sin that infects humanity. As Benedictine monk and Scripture scholar Damasus Winzen wrote: “The fiery serpents are the symbol of the sins of men, and the bronze serpent foreshadows the one who took on the flesh of sins without sin, that through faith in his death for our sins, we may be freed from death” (*Pathways in Scripture*).

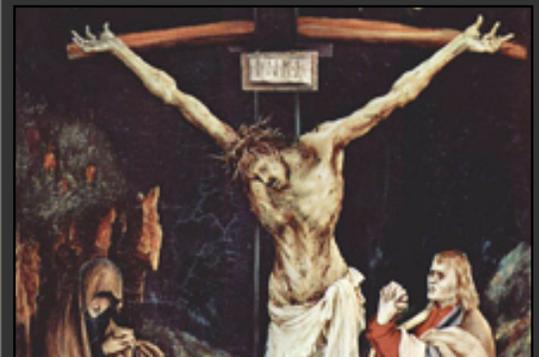
- > Next: [Contemplating Christ's Passion](#), by Jeanne Kun
 > See also: [Freedom from Sin and Death: "A New Creation"](#)

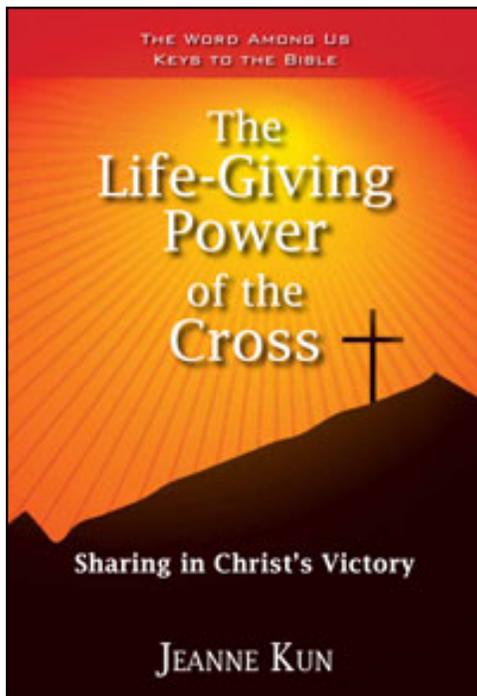
Emmaus, have you ever failed to recognize Jesus’ presence or action in your life or felt downcast and disappointed, without hope for your future? What were your prayers to Jesus like then? How did the Lord reveal himself to you and encourage you?

2. How has your knowledge of Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in Jesus deepened your faith? What particular word of Scripture has caused your heart to “burn” within you? Why?
3. Recall an instance in your life when you experienced “glory” and/or “victorious new life” coming out of suffering or what seemed like failure and defeat. What did you learn about God and his redemptive power from this circumstance?
4. How does your personal faith in Jesus’ resurrection and the future resurrection of the dead affect your outlook toward those around you—mortal men and women who, along with you, will “put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53) and live eternally? How does it affect your feelings about your own death?
5. How do you envision Jesus’ glorified body (Luke 24:36-40; John 20:19-20; Revelation 1:12-16)? How do you imagine your own resurrected existence in heaven?

In the Spotlight

The Throne of Love





Excerpted from [The Life-Giving Power of the Cross: Sharing in Christ's Victory](#), by Jeanne Kun ([The Word Among Us Press](#), © 2011). Used with permission. This book can be ordered [online](#).

Jeanne Kun is President of [Bethany Association](#) and a senior woman leader in the [Word of Life Community](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA.

The chief priests of Jesus' own people accused him of falsely claiming to be a king (Luke 23:2). Ironically, it was the gentile Pilate who, defying the Jewish elders, ordered that the title "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews" be affixed to the cross when Jesus was crucified (John 19:19-22). In the Tradition and writings of the Church, Jesus' crucifixion is frequently called his "enthronement" – an expression of kingship – because the cross, the instrument of his death, was also recognized as the means of his glorification and a sign of his victorious reign.

The throne of this King whom we worship . . . is the Cross, and his triumph is the victory of Love, an almighty love that from the Cross pours out his gifts upon humanity of all times and all places.

– Pope Benedict XVI

We venerate the cross as a safeguard of faith, as the strengthening of hope and the throne of love. It is the sign of mercy, the proof of forgiveness, the vehicle of grace and the banner of peace. We venerate the cross, because it has broken down our pride, shattered our envy, redeemed our sin, and atoned for our punishment. . . .

Whatever we accomplish for God, whatever we succeed and hope for, is the fruit of our veneration of the cross. By the cross Christ draws everything to him. It is the kingdom of the Father, the scepter of the Son and the seal of the Holy Spirit, a witness to the total Trinity.

– Rupert of Deutz

Act!

This week, share your faith in Christ's

resurrection with someone you know who is facing challenging circumstances (for example, physical illness, a financial crisis, depression, or a sense of hopelessness). Encourage this person to hold fast to the “eternal perspective” that St. Paul offers in Romans 8:18-19 and 22-25:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God. . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

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Doubting Thomas, by Caravaggio, 1602-03

What Is the Resurrection of Jesus?

by Joseph Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI

*An excerpt from *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week –
From the Entrance Into Jerusalem to the Resurrection**

“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:14-15). With these words Saint Paul explains quite drastically what faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ means for the Christian message overall: it is its very foundation. The Christian faith stands or falls with the truth of the testimony that Christ is risen from the dead.

If this were taken away, it would still be possible to piece together from the Christian tradition a series of interesting ideas about God and men, about man’s being and his obligations, a kind of religious world view: but the Christian faith itself would be dead. Jesus would be a failed religious leader, who despite his failure remains great and can cause us to reflect. But he would then remain purely human, and his authority would extend only so far as his message is of interest to us. He would no longer be a criterion; the only criterion left would be our own judgment in selecting from his heritage what strikes us as helpful. In other words, we would be alone. Our own judgment would be the highest instance.

Only if Jesus is risen has anything really new occurred that changes the world and the situation of mankind. Then he becomes the criterion on which we can rely. For then God has truly revealed himself.

To this extent, in our quest for the figure of Jesus, the Resurrection is the crucial point. Whether Jesus merely was or whether he also is – this depends on the Resurrection. In answering yes or no to this question, we are taking a stand not simply on one event among others, but on the figure of Jesus as such.

Therefore it is necessary to listen with particular attention as the New Testament bears witness to the Resurrection. Yet first we have to acknowledge that this testimony, considered from a historical point of view, is presented to us in a particularly complex form and gives rise to many questions.

Witnesses who encountered the risen Lord

What actually happened? Clearly, for the witnesses who encountered the risen Lord, it was not easy to say. They were confronted with what for them was an entirely new reality, far beyond the limits of their experience. Much as the reality of the event overwhelmed them and impelled them to bear witness, it was still utterly unlike anything they had previously known. Saint Mark tells us that the disciples on their way down from the mountain of the Transfiguration were puzzled by the saying of Jesus that the Son of Man would “rise from the dead”. And they asked one another what “rising from the dead” could mean (9:9-10). And indeed, what does it mean? The disciples did not know, and they could find out only through encountering the reality itself.

Anyone approaching the Resurrection accounts in the belief that he knows what rising from the dead means will inevitably misunderstand those accounts and will then dismiss them as meaningless. Rudolf Bultmann raised an objection against Resurrection faith by arguing that even if Jesus had come back from the grave, we would have to say that “a miraculous natural event such as the resuscitation of a dead man” would not help us and would be existentially irrelevant (cf. *New Testament and Mythology*, p. 7).

Now it must be acknowledged that if in Jesus’ Resurrection we were dealing simply with the miracle of a resuscitated corpse, it would ultimately be of no concern to us. For it would be no more important than the resuscitation of a clinically dead person through the art of doctors. For the world as such and for our human existence, nothing would have changed. The miracle of a resuscitated corpse would indicate that Jesus’ Resurrection was equivalent to the raising of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:22-24, 35-43 and parallel passages), and Lazarus (John 11:1-44). After a more or less short period, these individuals returned to their former lives, and then at a later point they died definitively.

The New Testament testimonies leave us in no doubt that what happened in the “Resurrection of the Son of Man” was utterly different. Jesus’ Resurrection was about breaking out into an entirely new form of life, into a life that is no longer subject to the law of dying and becoming, but lies beyond it – a life that opens up a new dimension of human existence. Therefore the Resurrection of Jesus is not an isolated event that we could set aside as something limited to the past, but it constitutes an “evolutionary leap” (to draw an analogy, albeit one that is easily misunderstood). In Jesus’ Resurrection a new possibility of human existence is attained that affects everyone and that opens up a future, a new kind of future, for mankind.

Inseparable link with Jesus' Resurrection and ours

So Paul was absolutely right to link the resurrection of Christians and the Resurrection of Jesus inseparably together: “If the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. . . . But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:16, 20). Christ’s Resurrection is either a universal event, or it is nothing, Paul tells us. And only if we understand it as a universal event, as the opening up of a new dimension of human existence, are we on the way toward any kind of correct understanding of the New Testament Resurrection testimony.

On this basis we can understand the unique character of this New Testament testimony. Jesus has not returned to a normal human life in this world like Lazarus and the others whom Jesus raised from the dead. He has entered upon a different life, a new life – he has entered the vast breadth of God himself, and it is from there that he reveals himself to his followers.

For the disciples, too, this was something utterly unexpected, to which they were only slowly able to adjust. Jewish faith did indeed know of a resurrection of the dead at the end of time. New life was linked to the inbreaking of a new world and thus made complete sense. If there is a new world, then there is also a new mode of life there. But a resurrection into definitive otherness in the midst of the continuing old world was not foreseen and therefore at first made no sense. So the promise of resurrection remained initially unintelligible to the disciples.

The process of coming to Resurrection faith is analogous to what we saw in the case of the Cross. Nobody had thought of a crucified Messiah. Now the “fact” was there, and it was necessary, on the basis of that fact, to take a fresh look at Scripture. We saw in the previous chapter how Scripture yielded new insights in the light of the unexpected turn of events and how the “fact” then began to make sense.

Admittedly, the new reading of Scripture could begin only after the Resurrection, because it was only through the Resurrection that Jesus was accredited as the one sent by God. Now people had to search Scripture for both Cross and Resurrection, so as to understand them in a new way and thereby come to believe in Jesus as the Son of God.

This also presupposes that for the disciples the Resurrection was just as real as the Cross. It presupposes that they were simply overwhelmed by the reality, that, after their initial hesitation and astonishment, they could no longer ignore that reality. It is truly he. He is alive; he has spoken to us; he has allowed us to touch him, even if he no longer belongs to the realm of the tangible in the normal way.

Living anew forever in the power of God

The paradox was indescribable. He was quite different, no mere resuscitated corpse, but one living anew and forever in the power of God. And yet at the same time, while no longer belonging to our world, he was truly present there, he himself. It was an utterly unique experience, which burst open the normal boundaries of experience and yet for the disciples was quite beyond doubt. This explains the unique character of the Resurrection accounts: they speak of something paradoxical, of something that surpasses all experience and yet is utterly real and present.

But could it really be true? Can we – as men of the modern world – put our faith in such testimony? “Enlightened” thinking would say no. For Gerd Lüdemann, for example, it seems clear that in consequence of the “revolution in the scientific image of the world . . . the traditional concepts of Jesus’ Resurrection are to be considered outdated” (quoted in Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* 1/2, pp. 119-20). But what exactly is this “scientific image of the world”? How far can it be considered normative? Hartmut Gese in his important article “Die Frage des Weltbildes”, to which I should like to draw attention, has painstakingly described the limits of this normativity.

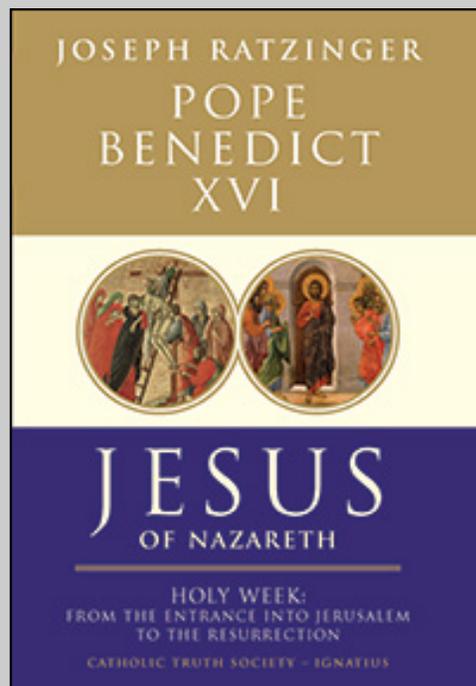
Naturally there can be no contradiction of clear scientific data. The Resurrection accounts certainly speak of something outside our world of experience. They speak of something new, something unprecedented – a new dimension of reality that is revealed. What already exists is not called into question. Rather we are told that there is a further dimension, beyond what was previously known. Does that contradict science? Can there really only ever be what there has always been? Can there not be something unexpected, something unimaginable, something new? If there really is a God, is he not able to create a new dimension of human existence, a new dimension of reality altogether? Is not creation actually waiting for this last and highest “evolutionary leap”, for the union of the finite with the infinite, for the union of man and God, for the conquest of death?

Jesus' Resurrection – smallest mustard of history

Throughout the history of the living, the origins of anything new have always been small, practically invisible, and easily overlooked. The Lord himself has told us that “heaven” in this world is like a mustard seed, the smallest of all the seeds (Matthew 13:31-32), yet contained within it are the infinite potentialities of God. In terms of world history, Jesus’ Resurrection is improbable; it is the smallest mustard seed of history.

This reversal of proportions is one of God’s mysteries. The great – the mighty – is ultimately the small. And the tiny mustard seed is something truly great. So it is that the Resurrection has entered the world only through certain mysterious appearances to the chosen few. And yet it was truly the new beginning for which the world was silently waiting. And for the few witnesses – precisely because they themselves could not fathom it – it was such an overwhelmingly real happening, confronting them so powerfully, that every doubt was dispelled, and they stepped forth before the world with an utterly new fearlessness in order to bear witness: Christ is truly risen.

[Excerpt from [Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance Into Jerusalem To The Resurrection](#), by Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI, Chapter 9, © 2011 [Ignatius Press](#), San Francisco. Used with permission.]



“I hope that I have been granted an insight into the figure of our Lord that can be helpful to all readers who seek to encounter Jesus and to believe in him.”

- from the *Forward to Jesus of Nazareth, Part Two*

Joseph Ratzinger, for many years a renowned theologian, scripture scholar, and university professor, before becoming an archbishop, cardinal, and now pope of the Roman Catholic Church, was born in Bavaria, Germany in 1927. He was ordained priest in 1951. He became Archbishop of Munich and Freising in 1977.

When he was elected pope on April 19, 2005, he took the name Benedict XVI, in honor of St. Benedict of Nursia, the founder of Western monasticism. The pope said that “with his life and work St Benedict exercised a fundamental influence on the development of European civilization and culture” and helped Europe to emerge from the “dark night of history” that followed the fall of the Roman Empire.

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Coherence – a Gift of Christian Community

by Bob Tedesco

In this essay on Christian community, Bob Tedesco, a former president of the North American region of the [Sword of the Spirit](#), addresses the topic of building Christian communities that last and the importance of restoring intergenerational family life and clans that are mutually supportive of sustaining a Christian way of life together.

In a yearly review of our community life, our coordinators recognized that certain elements of our community life had weakened or slipped a bit. We discussed the situation in ways that identified a weakening of our overall vision, and for certain elements of our way of life, a loss of vision.

In recent decades and certainly through the twentieth century, society has changed significantly in structure. When the world changes, people change, and the Christian church is changed as well. In the past thirty to forty years, we have seen the Lord responding to those changes and restoring something *ancient*.

If we look at Old Testament societies, we can see individuals, couples, families, clans (two or more generations - clans not used here in the negative sense), tribes, and a people. Within the “people” we can see other groupings: priestly, governing, military, workers, etc. Modern societal structure (especially Western societies) seems to look more like: individuals, couples, families, weak extended families, and nations. Life is lived and decisions are made in a way that repeatedly destroys connectedness until we are isolated units. In our Sword of the Spirit communities we see individuals, couples, families, clans, the local community, a region and an international community of communities (a people).

Two founding directions

In the summer of 1973, our local community was given two founding words: “Gather my people together;” and “Build to last” (prophetic direction for the [People of God](#) in Pittsburgh). We have responded to the first word

(gather) with numerous expressions of evangelistic outreach: Life in the Spirit courses, retreats, conferences, concerts, prayer meetings, men's breakfasts, etc. We have also repeatedly emphasized evangelism on a personal level. "Gathering" has always been a significant part of our life together.

We have also taken "building" seriously from the beginning, and our national and international ties have had a lot to do with our understanding of how things go together in a way that will last: locally, trans-locally and internationally.

Gathering and building are expressed very well in Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commission. We noticed that it says, "Go and make disciples...teaching them to observe *all that I have commanded you.*"

So, for us it meant, first of all, discipleship; a discipleship where we are formed in Christian character. Second, it meant being put together (built) in a way that can endure in a culture that is hostile to Christianity and even more hostile to Christian culture.

Our coordinators take a concern for: 1) our ongoing relationship with Jesus; 2) our underlying attitudes, postures and influences; and 3) our long-term evangelism and growth. In Acts 2:41, we see the Bible takes a concern for growth when it says "that day 3,000 were added to their number."

Community growth for us comes from adult evangelism and transgenerational evangelism (the term we use to describe our children growing into adult members of the community).

A community of disciples on mission

We are a community of individuals, couples, clans and movements on mission. We have a lot of teaching material on discipleship, on community, on marriage and family life. We have very little teaching on movements and no teaching on life in a clan. We have recently developed a series on senior life, which can improve the role of seniors in community and extended families. But, we have very little written about extended family life in a Christian community.

Terminology

By "family" here, we mean the nuclear model with one generation of adults. "Clan" is used for extended family with two or three generations of adults living community life. By "movements" we mean groupings of adults with a common activity and outreach that support the overall mission of the community. Individuals and families are limited by life spans, but they lay a foundation for clans, movements, communities and the Sword of the Spirit that transcends lifetimes. Pastoral leaders and youth workers working with second and third generations have a special responsibility to be aware of and support those second and third generation members. They are key links in a network of relationships that span multiple generations.

On mission

It is not my intention here to talk at length about our mission but it should be said that our mission is:

- To evangelize, and to lead people into real decisions to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior, and to be baptized in the Holy Spirit
- To lead the individuals who have made those decisions into discipleship relationships of formation in Christian character and Christian community
- To rediscover and establish the Christian culture in scriptural wisdom
- To establish movements and outreaches that serve the Lord's purposes.

A bigger vision

Our vision is often *much* too small. The Lord's plan for individuals, couples and families far surpasses our limited view and ideas. The American nuclear family model is *not* the Lord's plan. The "nuclearization" of the family is creating walled-off social units that cannot be easily accessed by other extended family members and friends. What used to be a very permeable border is becoming increasingly opaque to outside light and influence. Some of that "thickening of the membrane" is due to fear, and part of it is due to the real need to survive in a toxic culture.

We also quickly absorb other modern attitudes and approaches. "I'm eighteen and I can do what I want!" Can you pay your own bills? I knew a man who used to say, "I can't wait until my kids graduate from high school so I can send them off to college!" I had serious news for him that some of the most difficult and needy years for some children are the years between eighteen and twenty-five!

Sometimes we say, "I want the best of everything for my children." Won't they end up being spoiled "brats" if they too easily get the best of everything? Christian parents might say, "If he would only answer an altar call..." but, would he not also need discipleship, supportive relationships, and Christian character formation? "They need to maximize their gifts and potential" is also a common posture.

The Lord is saying, "Come and go with me. It will cost you, but it will be better!" The Lord has a *big* strategy for families, clans, and movements; but modern influences and limitations are blocking the next levels from developing. These influences and limitations are worst at the personal and family levels.

A big strategy for clans and movements

First, we need to say again that the Lord's plan for family is bigger than the nuclear model. Keeping that in mind, we can begin to explore what he has in mind for clans and multi-generational family life. In some of our communities we have begun to see the unfolding of these expressions as multi-generational families emerge in communities that are 30-40 years in existence. Knowing that multi-generational families are a part of his plan can sharpen the focus of my service, and my decisions can be made in light of his strategy. That is, we can live life *intentionally* and coherently to support the new life that is emerging. This is not rocket science. It is the Lord restoring and rebuilding what has been damaged or destroyed by ungodly modern living. Living for self is self-destructive at every level of life and every level of basic human groupings.

On a worldwide basis, we see a steady stream of church movements that have served to bring individuals to encounter the living Christ so that lives, families, and vocations can be restored to him. All of this spiritual activity and energy is ultimately intended for the rebuilding of *his* family.

Again, knowing more of his plan sharpens the focus of my service: I know how to pastor or to steward that which I have been placed over. I even know more about how to write my will!

However, a greater body of teaching is still needed since the Lord is restoring expressions of the Body that we had not anticipated. For example, men and women living "single for the Lord" in an ecumenical setting and yet attached or related to a wider body of families and singles. Additionally, the fostering and protecting of clans is an area in need of teaching and development. Clusters or intentional neighborhood living has been explored with some success, but it has not yet seen the development and understanding of its dynamic to get the most out of it. But, think about that: intentional Christian neighborhoods! These would be neighborhoods where our young people could at least have some chance of developing life-long Christian relationships.

The Lord is restoring something in covenant Christian community: a stable network of brothers and sisters with whom we can grow old, while serving him over the span of generations; a place where our children can grow up with friends, marry and raise their children in the company of lifelong friendships.

Coherence – a gift of community

So, the various aspects of our life together – relationships, covenant, discipleship, mission, worship – are all meant to go together, to add up to something, to build something for God that lasts. His plan is *coherent* – it makes sense. It is understandable (though not fully revealed). It is seamless. It is discernable and intelligent. It is comprehensive, and it is long-term. We think in terms of one or two generations. He sees many. This plan involves individuals, families, clans, movements, and tribes or communities. Our lives and the lives of these groupings are meant to add up to something, to be built into something. In building terms we are not just raw materials, we are stones built into a dwelling place. In farming terms we are not just seeds of wheat scattered in a random field, but the field is prepared, turned over with the rows such that the plants support each other when the wind blows, and at the harvest, the fruit is easily gathered. *We are not a single stalk of wheat in a windstorm, but a field of wheat in mutual support.*

Life was more naturally coherent in earlier times. Farms served villages, and the marketplace provided a continual intersection for people who would know each other for lifetimes. Congregations and denominations never had to take a concern for the disintegration of what seemed to be the natural structure of humanity. Today's lifestyle seems more like a patchwork of temporary relationships: in many cases functional relationships (e.g. career) which vaporize with the next downsizing, or graduation, or the next "opportunity." The Lord is restoring something in covenant Christian community: a stable network of brothers and sisters with whom we can grow old, while serving him over the span of generations; a place where our children can grow up with friends, marry and raise their children in the company of lifelong friendships. We need to see the vision, embrace it and teach it to our children.

Coherent or "buffet"

We are modern, informed consumers. We shop for the best: the best values, investments, groups, and activities. Often, however, we do that without a coherent strategy, or without a long-term sense of how our choices fit together. If we took a patchwork approach to planning for retirement, we would find ourselves relying on Social Security. Yet, we can invest a lot of time and money in Christianity without taking concern for how it might all fit together in the Lord's plan. Parents taking a real concern for their children often "shop" for the best schools, the best youth groups, etc. This "patchwork" Christianity does not build the Body of Christ, but repeatedly weakens it. In worst cases, the children are even leading the family in several directions that end up having a *disconnecting*, incoherent effect on the family. Mission trips, youth groups, retreats, gatherings, campus groups, small groups and relationships should all connect, they should build into something.

Summary

I would advise young families to plan to be a clan: to take a coherent approach to life and choices, and to raise the children so that they understand and can embrace the call. Additionally, we need to orient the family and clan beyond itself so that it embraces and is built into the wider community and even to the community of communities (the Sword of the Spirit).

More developed families will find it harder, since the children will not have seen this from an early age, but we can still aid the process by making good decisions. For example, if we decide to send them to the "best" college hundreds of miles away, we make a decision that "disconnects" them from family and friends and usually results in

them settling in some other area of the planet.

Mature families and singles can also live so as to support this work of God in service and in pastoral work. [Two passages from the Book of Revelation depict God's people gathered together into a holy city – the new Jerusalem.]

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away; and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.” And he who sat upon the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.”

– Revelation 21:1-5

In the Spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed; on the three east gates, on the three north gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles...

– Revelation 21:10-14

The Lord is building something; it has a design; it has foundations, walls and gates, and a detailed plan.

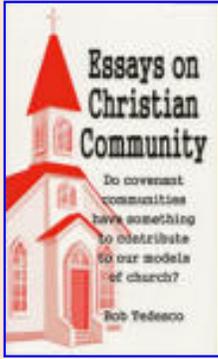
“Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers. And fear came upon every soul; and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

– Acts 2:40b-47

They lived differently: not just a little differently but radically different lives. They spent a lot of time together and shared things. Their life together was a part of the Lord’s plan to save them from a “crooked generation” (vs. 40).

For all of us, our lives are called to have purpose, to make sense, to add up to something; we need to stay together and make decisions and investments of time and money that support our call.

[This article is excerpted from [Essays on Christian Community](#), (c) copyright 2010 Bob Tedesco. Used with permission. The book can be purchased at [Tabor House](#).]



Essays on Christian Community:

Do covenant communities have something to contribute to our models of church?

written by Bob Tedesco,
published by [Tabor House](#), Lansing,
Michigan, 2010, 157 pages.

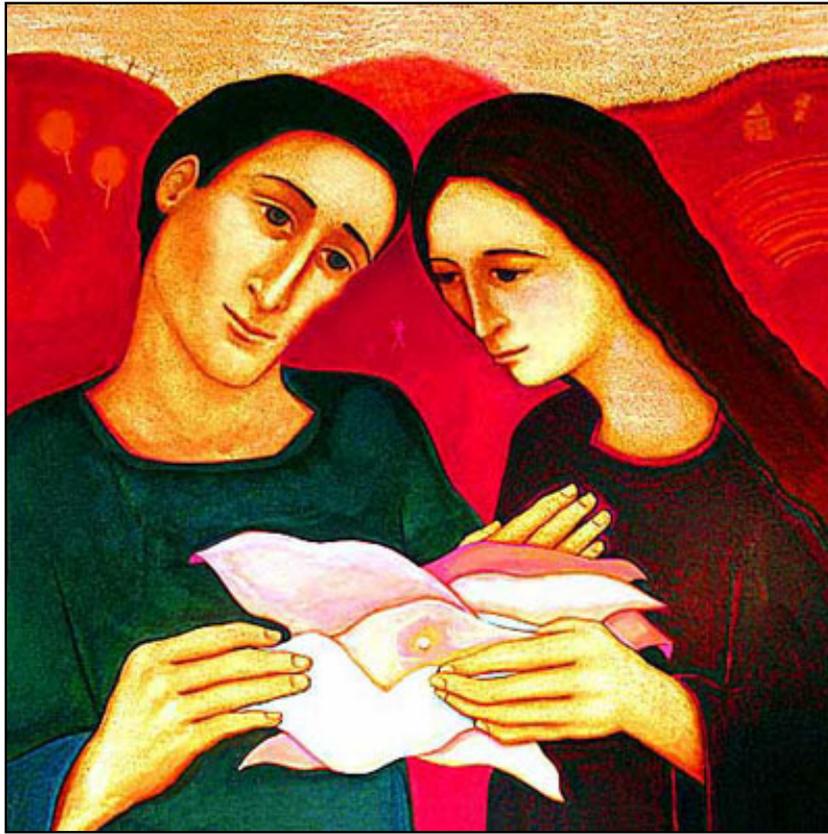


Bob Tedesco is past President of the North American Region of the Sword of the Spirit, a founder of the People of God community in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, and has been one of its key leaders for the past 38 years.

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The Pearl of Great Price by [Michael O'Brien](#)

Order in Marriage

Does the Bible really mean what it says?

By Jerry Munk

A substantial amount of teaching and practice relating to marriage and family life in the Sword of the Spirit is based upon a principle taught in scripture: that the husband should serve as the head of his wife and family. This principle has become increasingly controversial in recent decades. It is less and less embraced in modern culture, and it is less and less embraced in many Christian environments as well. In 1980, Steve Clark (a founder and past president of the Sword of the Spirit) wrote the book *Man and Woman in Christ*. While his book provides an excellent and very thorough explanation of the position of the Sword of the Spirit, many people find its length and scholarly approach a bit daunting. A shorter discussion may meet the needs of many members of the Sword of the Spirit, and that is the goal of this article.

A number of passages point to the idea of the husband being the head of his wife and family. I will list several using the Revised Standard Version (RSV).

- 1 Corinthians 11:3 *I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her*

husband, and the head of Christ is God.

- Ephesians 5:21-24 *Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands.*
- 1 Timothy 3:2-5 *Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife...He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church? (Note: while this passage discusses the position of bishop, it has more general application as well.)*
- Titus 2:4-5 *Train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be sensible, chaste, domestic, kind, and submissive to their husbands, that the word of God may not be discredited.*
- Colossians 3:18 *Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*
- 1 Peter 3:1-5 *Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior... So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands.*

The passages above present clearly the principle already stated: that the husband should serve as the head of his wife and family. Many Christians, however, do not see it that way. They see compelling reasons why we should not accept these passages at face value. I will do my best to summarize these arguments and will give a short response to each.

Some Arguments Against

Cultural Bias: Some people argue that the authors of these passages (mainly the Apostle Paul) were simply constrained by the culture in which they lived. First-century Mediterranean society very much favored men, and the writers of scripture carried that cultural bias into the Bible, they say. Since the authors (especially Paul) were unenlightened and we are, we can and should disregard their teaching on the subject.

Response: I do not think that I (or any Christian) can disregard any part of the Bible. In 2 Timothy 3:16 we read: All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness. Christians traditionally have understood that the Holy Spirit inspired the writers, who faithfully transmitted what they received from God. There are some disagreements among Christians about what books are included in Holy Scripture, whether the process was more dictation or inspiration, and how one passage might impact another, but for 2,000 years Christian churches have accepted the Bible as God's written revelation of his will, and we would do well to continue that practice.

If we accept the idea of divine inspiration of scripture, the question is not was Paul culturally biased but was God the Holy Spirit culturally biased? Human culture simply does not impact God in that way. Rather, again and again the Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the Bible to say things that very much stood against the accepted culture of the time.

Perhaps cultural bias is working in us and not the writers of the Bible. We live in a culture that finds the passages cited above objectionable, so we are tempted to make them go away. In Romans 12:2 we find a passage that applies: Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.

Modification: Some people argue that the passages above (and others) are modified by Galatians 3:28: There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ

Jesus. They say that if there is no longer male or female, but all are one in Christ, the husband cannot be the head of his wife because doing so makes men and women unequal in an important way.

Response: While it is true that we have to understand passages within the larger context of scripture, and that some Bible passages are fulfilled or expanded (not quite the same as modified) by other passages, there is not a strong argument that Galatians 3 modifies Ephesians 5. One reason for this is that the book of Ephesians was written after the book of Galatians. If anything, Ephesians would modify Galatians.

I do not think, however, that either passage modifies the other. Rather, they are addressing different subjects: Ephesians 5:21-24 is addressing structure and order within the Christian family while Galatians 3:28 is addressing our standing and inheritance in Jesus Christ. The two passages are not at odds with each other; indeed, they are complimentary: in Jesus Christ men and women have equal standing and inheritance before God (talk about an idea that flies in the face of the prevailing culture of that time), and the two passages taken together instruct people with equal standing and inheritance to order themselves in a particular way.

An example may help us to better understand Ephesians 5:21-24 and Galatians 3:28. Several years ago my father passed away (my mother had died previously). My father's will stated that his children (my siblings and I) were to receive equal shares of his estate. The very same will, however, named a sister and me as executors of the estate. Therefore, we all had equal standing and an equal inheritance, but two of us were asked to serve in a way different than the others. Our service did not make us any better than our siblings, it did not give us a larger inheritance – it simply gave us some work to do. The arrangement brought a measure of peace and order to the situation. Similarly men and women have equal standing before God and an equal inheritance in Jesus Christ; they are also instructed to serve in different ways.

Galatians 3:28 does, I think, point to an important principle: although the husband is appointed the head of his wife, this does not imply superiority. In Christ, one can serve as the head and another can serve by submitting without there being an implication of better-than or less-than. In much the same way, Jesus Christ submitted his will to the Father, and yet Christians proclaim in the Creed that Jesus Christ is “homoousios” (of the same essence, or consubstantial) with the Father.

Mutual Submission: Ephesians 5:21 says, *Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.* [Other translations read “submitting to one another” (NKJV), “submit to one another” (NIV), and “being subject one to another” (Douay-Rheims)]. Some argue that this passage turns the idea of submission on its head by demanding that husbands must likewise submit to their wives. Therefore, they say, the wife has the same authority over her husband as the husband has over his wife – either both are head or neither is head.

Response: It is helpful, I think, to remember that this passage was originally written in Greek, and that “be subject to” and “submit” are attempts to translate into English the Greek word “hupotasso.” Hupotasso is a military term meaning “to arrange in a military fashion under the command of a leader” (Thayer and Smith Bible Dictionary). With this understanding we can see that Ephesians 5:21 is something of a heading for the verses that follow: “arrange yourselves under godly authority: wives to husbands (5:22), children to parents (6:1), and slaves to masters (6:5).”

Even if one goes with the translation “submit to one another,” that verse does not negate what follows or the many other passages that speak of a wife submitting to her husband and the husband being the head of his wife. If it were the Holy Spirit's intention to break this long-established pattern in marriage (1 Peter 3:5 *So once the holy women... were submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.*) it would seem that he would have said so clearly, but while there are numerous passages that reinforce the husband's headship in marriage and family,

not one passage directs the husband to submit to his wife.

Headship: Another line of thinking focuses on the word “head.” The word head (kephale in Greek) does not indicate authority, some say, but something more like “source” or the “headwaters” of a river. With this understanding the verse has a deeper meaning: the husband is the source/headwaters of the wife as Christ is the source/headwaters of the church. Given this understanding, the passage is not talking about authority, but pointing back to the creation narrative in which Eve literally comes out of Adam; and in the same way the church’s source and headwaters is Jesus Christ.

Response: Indeed, this is beautiful imagery. The problem is that the Bible typically uses the Greek word kephale to refer to that object perched upon ones shoulders, the head. Some examples:

- Mark 6:24 *What shall I ask? And she said, The head (kephale) of John the Baptist.*
- Matthew 27:29 *When they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head (kephale).*
- Luke 21:18 *But not a hair of your head (kephale) shall perish.*

Again, even if one uses the more poetic “source” or “headwater” to translate kephale, this does not much alter the overall meaning of the passage: As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Nor does it much impact the many other passages that point to the headship of the husband.

Slavery: A common critique of headship in marriage and family goes something like this: In the 18th and 19th centuries, American (and other) slave owners pointed to scripture passages about slavery to justify their owning slaves. Those who point to scripture passages about the headship of husbands are doing much the same thing: pointing to scripture to justify an unjust practice.

Response: True, the Bible addresses slavery. It acknowledges that slavery was a practice and it laid out rules to govern it. It must be said, however, that the slavery of the Bible looked nothing like what was practiced in the Americas. American slavery was an evil perversion – and it was Christians, quoting Bible verses, who rightly led the charge to end it. The Bible set strict limits on the practice of slavery. Nowhere does it command that individuals hold slaves. Indeed, the Old Testament commands that within the people of God, slaves be set free in the Year of Jubilee. Christians ought not to pervert and twist God’s word to make it say whatever they want. They ought not to go beyond the limits God has set. That they did so in regard to slavery was sin. In the present case, however, we are not trying to twist or go beyond; we are simply trying to apply personally the clear and often repeated biblical teaching about order in marriage and family.

The Central Problem

I understand that talking about the husband being the head of his wife is counter-cultural (to say the least) in modern society. I also understand that many husbands have abused the position of headship and distorted the teaching of scripture. I can see why people today – especially women – would look at the passages listed at the beginning of this article and wonder, “Does this really mean what it says?”

At the same time, I understand that God is sovereign. He has authority to set things up however he wants to. I do not have to understand why. I assume he has good reasons for arranging things as he has—he probably created humanity with this very arrangement in mind. It is not my place to apologize for God or for the writers of Holy Scripture. Nor is it my job to judge or change Holy Scripture; just the opposite, Holy Scripture is supposed to judge and change me. The Bible is radical and challenging with some regularity; it is not my place to try and make it less radical or less challenging. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25):

that is a radical and challenging word for me as a husband. Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22): that is a radical and challenging word for my wife.

The central problem as I see it is this: if one can take this considerable collection of scriptures and say these words from God do not mean what they say, Holy Scripture – God’s revelation of himself and of his will for humankind – ceases to have much meaning at all. If “the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church” does not mean what it says, then what does “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3) mean?

Indeed, there are a number of clear scriptural teachings that fly in the face of the values and sensibilities of modern society:

- That marriage is the only context for sexual relating
- That homosexual acts are sinful
- That Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father and to salvation.

If we can set aside or explain away clear biblical teaching about order in marriage, can we not set aside or explain away clear biblical teaching about these other “offensive” ideas as well. Indeed, many have set them aside; many have explained them away. It is good, I think, to keep some other scriptural teaching in mind as we read passages that the world finds offensive. Among these are...

- Matthew 7:26 *Everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.*
- 1 John 5:3-4 *For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.*
- Romans 12:2 *Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*

Historical Abuses

While upholding the teaching of scripture about order in family life, it is important to recognize offensive historical policies that sought to limit the role and rights of women. For centuries women were denied the right to vote, to sign contracts, to own property, and in other ways were limited and marginalized by governmental and social policy. Again, Bible passages were used to defend such practices, and that historical precedent continues to distort understanding of what the Bible actually teaches.

The biblical ideal of woman is not one of weakness and dependence – it is of strength and virtue. The godly wife of Proverbs 31 conducts business, buys property, supervises the household staff, works hard to provide for her family, and is looked to as a fountain of wisdom. Women labored side by side with the Apostle Paul and served as deaconesses in the early church. Abigail’s wisdom overruled her husband’s foolishness. Deborah served as a prophet and judge among God’s people. Lydia was a business woman and philanthropist.

The Bible admonishes a wife submit to her husband as an expression of her reverence for Jesus Christ. It is something that she does freely and willingly – a giving up of some autonomy for the sake of good order in a Christ-centered marriage. Her submission is not necessarily absolute. That same Greek word “hupotasso” used to instruct wives to submit to their husbands is also used in Romans 13:1 where Christians are instructed: *be subject to the governing authorities*. When the governing authorities ordered Peter and the Apostles not to preach in the name of Jesus Christ, they replied: *We must obey God rather than men* (Acts 5:29). Similarly, a wife’s first obedience is to God, and her husband may not expect his wife to obey unrighteous direction.

The husband's authority is to be guided and directed by Ephesians 5:25 *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Love is defined in the Bible in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* When a husband strays from the admonition to love his wife, or fails to follow the example of Jesus Christ who sacrificed himself for the good of his church, the marriage no longer operates as it should.

The Blessings of Obedience

I am comfortable with the Sword of the Spirit's teaching on order in marriage because it applies well the clear teaching of scripture. Modern society and many Christians may say that it is outdated, but the Bible really does mean what it says. In the Sword of the Spirit we have experienced good fruit in seeking to apply the clear teaching of scripture to our day-to-day lives. Generally, we have strong marriages and families, with husbands who are truly engaged in leading the family in the Lord. We have experienced tangibly the blessings of obedience. In contrast, modern society, which rejects God's instruction, has seen an overall breakdown of marriage and family, especially the role of husbands and fathers. God's word can be radical, and we should allow it to be radical. We can allow it to say what it says and then humbly obey.



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publishing address: Park Royal Business Centre, 9-17 Park Royal Road, Suite 108, London NW10 7LQ, United Kingdom
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Hearing God and Controlling the Situation

by Sam Williamson

In 1989 the company I worked for was dying. It was losing money like the prodigal son, it had had a two-year sales drought, and our owner – though previously successful – was out of cash. The company asked me to demonstrate our software to one of our prospective clients. Actually, our only prospective client. If we didn't land this deal, we were out of business and I was out of a job.

The night before the demo, the client's consultant Jerry invited me to dinner. He said our competitors had bungled their demos by wasting half of their time showing "cool" features that the client didn't need. And when the client said they weren't interested in such functionality, our competitors ignored their requests, and continued showing off the coolness of this or that particular feature.

Jerry went on to say that our competitors had failed because they wouldn't yield control of the conversation to the client. The competitors *thought* they knew what was needed, while in fact only the client *knew* what was needed. Jerry suggested I begin my demo by asking the client to describe their needs. And then he suggested that I use the rest of the presentation to show solutions to their needs. I did. They liked it. We got the deal. And I kept my cubicle.

What does demoing software and controlling conversations have to do with hearing God?

Everything.

During the last several months of 2011, I faced a major decision. Almost every day I asked God for direction. I prayed, I begged for wisdom, I asked friends, I read scripture; and God continued to withhold a direct answer to my question.

This past week I was reading Colossians where Paul prays that we be “filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Colossians 1:9).

I said to God, “That’s what I’m asking for, knowledge of your will.”

And in my heart I felt God say, “No you aren’t.” (Please note that no writing on the wall appeared and no audible voice spoke, but a tug in my heart told me to stop, that somehow, somewhere, something wasn’t right.)

I paused to reflect on what this tug in my heart might mean, and I realized that I was not actually asking God for his will. Instead, I wanted an answer to *this* question – and this question alone – while God was speaking to me about something completely different. While claiming I wanted his will, I really only wanted his input in the area I *thought* was most important. I was ignoring what he *knew* was most important.

I was controlling the conversation – with God! – by ignoring what he wanted to talk about.

It’s not that God doesn’t want to answer our questions, but that our questions often miss the main message he wants to convey. It’s like asking God which color to paint my closet while he builds me a mansion next door. When I finally listen to God’s answer – which is quite often grander and more profound than what I’m looking for – then (and only then) will I have the answer for my comparatively tiny question.

While I was wrestling with my question these past months, God kept talking about other things, and I felt – though I never said it to myself – as if God were missing the point, that *he wasn’t answering my question*. But he *was* answering my question by answering a deeper question than the one I pursued.

And I wasn’t listening, because I was controlling the conversation.



God is always speaking to us, but his answers are almost always deeper and more profound than what our simple questions ask.

- Moses saw a strange bush on fire, and he asked, “What’s that all about?” and God said, “I want you to lead my people out of slavery into freedom.” God’s answer didn’t directly answer Moses’ question.

- Nicodemus said to Jesus, “You clearly are a man of God,” and Jesus answered, “If you want to see the Kingdom of God you need a new life, you have to be born yet again.” Again, a seeming non-sequitor.
- The woman at the well asked Jesus to “give her this water so she’d never be thirsty again,” and Jesus told her to go get her husband.

God is always speaking, always offering more than we ask or think. Moses was curious about a scientific anomaly and God gave him a new life mission. Nicodemus wanted a bit of wisdom so he could live a bit better and Jesus offered a whole new righteousness. The woman at the well wanted freedom from a domestic chore and Jesus offered a life of freedom from her relational addiction.

Not only does the bible include conversationally oriented episodes, it also includes an entire book on the subject. The book of Job has spoken to more people than any book written by any modern author (including C. S. Lewis) and the book of Job has comforted more suffering people than any other book ever written.

And the book of Job concerns who controls the conversation.

The first 29 *verses* of Job sketch what happens to Job. The next 36 *chapters* paint a picture of people controlling the conversation – Job’s wife and friends and even Job – all asking why God has done this. The best advice given to Job comes from the youngest counselor, who tells Job to stop controlling the conversation, “Listen to this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God” (Job 37:14).

And when Job finally stands still, God speaks, revealing his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And Job was satisfied, saying, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, *but now my eye sees you*” (Job 42:5). And that is all we ever really need.

So God, let’s talk. Uh, you first.

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Sam Williamson grew up in Detroit, Michigan, USA. He is the son of a Presbyterian pastor and grandson of missionaries to China. He moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1975. He worked in London England from 1979 to 1982, helping to establish [Antioch](#), a member community of the Sword of the Spirit. After about twenty-five years as an executive at a software company in Ann Arbor he sensed God call him to something new. He left the software company in 2008 and now speaks at men’s retreats, churches, and campus outreaches. He is married to Carla Williamson and they have four grown children and a grandson. He has a blog site, www.beliefs-of-the-heart.com, and can be reached at Sam@BeliefsOfTheHeart.com.



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“Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”

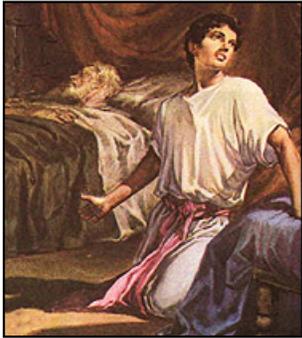
(1 Samuel 3:9,10)

by Don Schwager



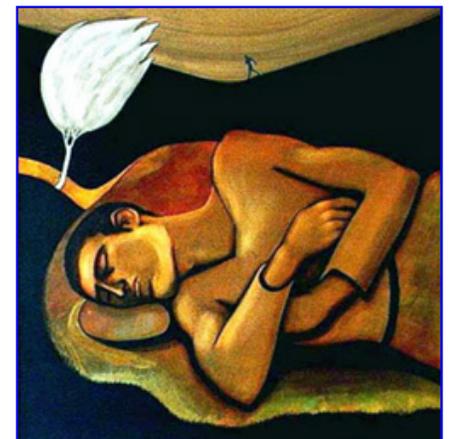
Who is listening?

In every age and in every place the Lord is ready to speak to young and old alike – to those who allow him to open their ears to his voice and their hearts to his message. We see two great examples in the Old Testament – the young boy Samuel and the older prophet Elijah.



In the first book of Samuel, chapter 3, we read the story of the boy Samuel who lived with the prophet Eli in the temple at Shiloh. Three times Samuel heard a voice calling out his name, “Samuel, Samuel,” as he lay sleeping in the temple precincts. Samuel was sure that Eli had called him. But Eli discerned finally that the voice was the Lord himself who wished to speak with Samuel. Eli counseled Samuel to answer, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:9). From that day forward Samuel’s ears were opened to the voice of God and he grew in his ability to hear and obey the word of the Lord.

Elijah, one of the greatest of the Old Testament prophets, was very zealous for the Lord. He spoke the word of God courageously in the face of stiff opposition and persecution. He confronted the false gods who were corrupting his people, and he slew the priests of Baal and destroyed their altar on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18). But his courage failed him when Queen Jezebel threatened to kill him. In despair Elijah fled for his life and journeyed for 40 days in the wilderness until he reached Horeb the mount of God, also known as Mount Sinai, where God had spoken with Moses and made a covenant with Israel. 1 Kings 19 describes how God made his presence known to Elijah at Mount Horeb, in “a still small voice.”



The Lord said to Elijah: “Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD.” And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent

the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Eli'jah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Eli'jah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and slain your prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away" (1 Kings 19:11-14).

Listening well to the voice of the Lord doesn't come easily to most of us. We often hear the word of the Lord in the reading of the Scriptures, in the teaching of our elders, and in the wise counsel of our brothers and sisters in the Lord. The Lord also speaks to us when we quiet our hearts and incline our ears to hear his "still small voice" as Elijah did. But our ability to listen well can easily be dulled by noisy distractions and busyness of life. And if we are honest with ourselves, there are times when we don't want to listen. We stop our ears or pretend we didn't hear in the first place.

How often have we heard the complaint, "You're not listening to me." Parents say it to their children, children to their parents, teachers to their students, couples to one another. And even when people say they are listening, the complaint often goes "You don't understand what I'm saying," or "That's not what I'm trying to communicate to you," or some variation of this. Speaking and listening, being heard and being understood, go together.

We listen not only with our ears, but with our hearts and minds. If our heart is not engaged in the conversation or if our mind is closed or distracted, there will be little chance for real interpersonal dialogue and understanding to take place. The Lord wants to open our ears and speak to us, but we have to allow him to teach us how to listen to his voice.

I had to learn this lesson the hard way as I was discerning what course to chart for my life. When I was approaching graduation as a university student, I was pretty confident that I knew what I wanted to do with my life and how I wanted to serve the Lord. I presented my plan to the Lord and expected him to pretty much endorse it. To my surprise the Lord led me to read from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 55. Two verses in particular hit me hard:

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:10-11).

I wrestled with this passage and with the Lord in prayer for three months. Several times I asked the Lord to give me a passage from Scripture that would guide me in discerning his will for me. Each time I prayed for a passage my eye fell on that same verse from Isaiah – "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." I even bought a brand new Bible with gold painted edges that made the pages stick together and with a new binding that had not yet been creased. When I prayed and opened the new Bible my eyes fell on the same verse from Isaiah 55.

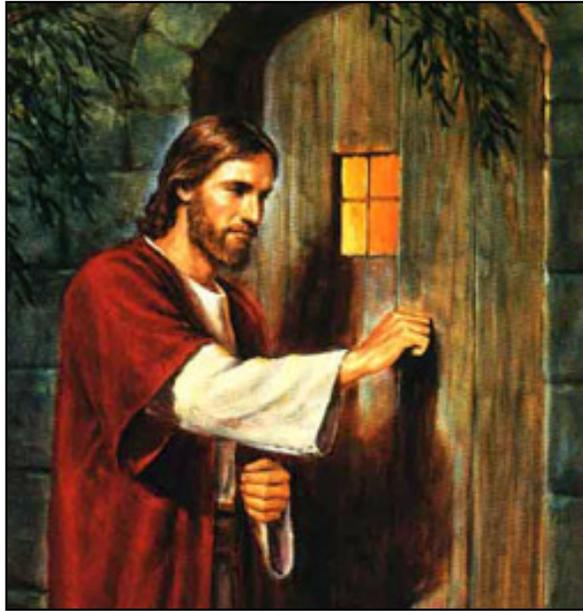
I slowly realized over the course of the summer that the Lord wanted me to put aside my own plans and aspirations so I could be more receptive and ready to hear whatever he wanted to say to me. This lesson also taught me to listen more attentively to those who knew me well, to see what direction they might receive from the Lord for me. With this change of heart it became much easier for me to pray and listen, both to the "still small voice" of the Lord within my heart and to the advice of others who were praying for me. And he did speak. Now forty-two years later, I can confidently say I did indeed hear the voice of the Lord and receive his direction for my life through the counsel of my brothers and sisters in the Lord and through the confirmation of his word in my heart.

Our ability to hear and respond to God with love and trust mirrors our ability to hear our neighbor with love and trust. If we want to grow in listening to God, we also have to learn how to listen to our neighbor as well. When Mother Teresa

accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo in 1979, she referred to the words John the Evangelist wrote in his First Letter. She said, paraphrasing them,

It is not enough for us to say: “I love God, but I do not love my neighbor.” Saint John says that you are a liar if you say you love God and you don’t love your neighbor (1 John 4:20). How can you love God whom you do not see, if you do not love your neighbor whom you see, whom you touch, with whom you live?

Saint John’s point about love applies to listening as well. “How can we say we hear God whom we do not see or hear audibly, if we do not even listen to our neighbor whom we do see and hear audibly?”



Heart speaks to heart

The Lord wants to speak to each of us from the depth of his heart to the very core of our own. He invites us into an intimate dialogue of love – the love of an eternal Father who yearns for the reciprocal love of his sons and daughters. He is always ready to speak – at any moment, any season, any place – he only waits for us to open the door of our heart to welcome and receive him. In the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, we hear the invitation which the risen Lord Jesus speaks to all his disciples throughout every age. Every day Christ stands at the door of our heart and he longs to enter.

“Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and *opens the door*, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelations 3:21).

In biblical times the invitation to join someone in a meal was considered the most gracious and intimate sign of friendship and communion. When God speaks to us, he treats us as his beloved sons and daughters – he draws us into intimate communion with himself. God made us to know him – not simply to know some things about God – his greatness, glory, and majesty – but to know him personally as our God and eternal Father. That is why he speaks to us – day after day – to communicate his great love and care for us.

Hearing and obeying

Hearing the Lord involves more than simply listening to his word. The Lord wants his word to also form and shape us into the kind of people who please him in the way we think, speak, and act. Tellingly, the biblical words for “hearing” and “listening” are closely connected with “obeying” and “following” the Lord’s instructions.

The word obedience seems out of fashion today, but Scripture presents it as a key part of our relationship with God. Two examples. In the Old Testament the Hebrew word *shama* literally meant "to hear, listen, and obey." When the Lord made a covenant with his people at Mount Sinai, he said: "If you will *obey my voice* and keep my covenant, you shall be my possession ... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5).

The Apostle Peter in his First Letter explains how we have been "sanctified by the Spirit for *obedience* to Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2) who has made us "living stones built into a spiritual temple, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5).

We know from experience that hearing and obeying does not come naturally. We have to learn through instruction and example. How can we grow in hearing and obeying the voice of the Lord? The Lord Jesus is our model. When the Father sent him into the world, Jesus had to listen and obey, and to learn what his Father wanted him to say and do. Jesus understood that the prophecy of the suffering servant given to Isaiah applied directly to his mission as the one who would lay down his life as an atoning sacrifice for the sin of the world.

"The Lord God has given me the tongue of those who are taught... Morning by morning he wakens, he wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. The Lord has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I turned not backward." – Isaiah 50:4-5

When Jesus described to his disciples his relationship with his Father, he emphasized his attentive listening and obeying of his Father's instructions.

Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him" (John 8:28-29).

Hard hearts and dull ears

What can hold us back from hearing the Lord speak to us? Three big obstacles are indifference, lack of faith, and being preoccupied with other things. They stop our ears and hearts from listening. While Mary sat attentively at Jesus' feet to hear his words, Martha was preoccupied with an anxious concern to get the meal on the table (Luke 10:38-42). She was too busy to stop and listen – even for a moment.



Shortly after Jesus had miraculously fed 4,000 people with the multiplication of seven loaves (Mark 8:1-9), the apostles anxiously discovered that they had forgotten to bring enough food for their journey across the Sea of Galilee. Jesus

chided his disciples for their “hardness of heart” – their inability to hear and understand what he had demonstrated to them about his desire to provide for their needs.

Jesus said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? **Are your hearts hardened?** Having eyes do you not see, and **having ears do you not hear?** And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." And he said to them, "**Do you not yet understand?**" (Mark 8:14-21)

What does the Lord mean when he says, “Are your hearts hardened?” Well, it seems from the testimony of Scripture that God’s word cannot take root in us if we allow fear, anxiety, or indifference to take control. We must overcome fear with faith and doubt with trust. If we do not want fear, doubt, or anxiety to rule us, then we need to believe and obey God’s command to us. The psalmist says, “Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you” (Psalm 55:22). And the Apostle Peter in his first letter takes up the phrase, “Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you” (1 Peter 5:7). A key question we could ask ourselves is, “Whose word do we listen to and trust?” The Lord Jesus invites us to put our trust in him and in his unfailing love.

If we find it difficult to hear the Lord, we do not need to lose hope. The Lord himself will open our ears if we ask. Even when the Lord seems distant at times, he is, in reality, very close. And in this learning process we are in good company. The early disciples were also learning how to hear and believe.



After the Lord Jesus had died on the cross and was laid in the tomb, his disciples lost hope of ever seeing him again. They had forgotten that he had foretold not only his death on the cross but his rising again as well. When Mary Magdalene went to the tomb on Sunday morning to pay her respects to a dead body, she discovered to her surprise an

empty tomb (John 20:11-18). But when she saw the risen Lord standing near her and addressing her, she did not at first recognize him. When Jesus called her name, she knew beyond a doubt that it was truly his voice. She ran to tell the apostles that she had seen the Lord and heard him speak to her.

When two other disciples that same day were walking on the road to Emmaus, Jesus appeared to them and began to walk with them as well (Luke 24:13-32). They did not recognize the risen Lord at first, until he had explained the Scriptures to them and sat at table and broke bread with them. Then they exclaimed, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" (Luke 24:32) The Lord is always ready to receive us and to speak his word to us, to teach us how to listen.

The Lord Jesus stands at our door each day and he knocks. Will you open your heart to his voice and sit for a while and listen as Mary did in her home at Bethany and the two disciples did when they stopped for dinner on the road to Emmaus?

> Related article [reflections on the Letter to the Hebrews](#)

[Don Schwager is a member of [The Servants of the Word](#) and the author of the [Daily Scripture Reading and Meditation](#) website.]

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A Great Distraction

by Michael Shaughnessy

The main goal of the devil is not to get you to do the wrong thing. It is to get you to do anything but the right thing. He didn't care which false god Israel worshiped. Any would do, as long as it distracted them from the true God.

The world provides the devil with more options than ever to distract us. When bombarded with the spectacular, who pays attention to the dull? The news in your neighborhood is reality. It's just not as eyecatching as a tsunami in Taiwan or a hurricane in Haiti or a bomb in Belfast. Prayer, Bible reading, and helping your neighbor don't hold a candle to wildfires threatening celebrity homes in Hollywood.

The media compete to hold our attention and the devil doesn't care who wins: Baal, the internet, texting or Ashtaroth.

Television eye candy is addictive. It grabs your eyeball and won't let go. The world doesn't need to ban books, good works, family, or church, it just displaces them with non-stop distractions for the eye and ear. We trade fulfillment for fillfullment.

Watch any movie trailer and count the number of shot changes you see in 30 seconds.



We have probably reached the floor. Visual media at this pace creates brain stupor. Retaining information becomes nearly impossible.

Being careful about what you watch is important, but being careful how much you watch is at least as important. A drug-induced stupor may be more dangerous than one induced by television or online surfing, but a stupor is a stupor, and these days Americans are choosing for more stupor than ever.

For youth to choose the right thing they must learn to control the nonstop stimuli and constant sources of distraction. That's life in the modern world.

Mike Shaughnessy is an elder in [The Servants of the Word](#) and the Director of [Kairos in North America](#). Kairos is an international federation of outreaches to high school, university and post university aged people. This article was first published in the May 2011 Issue of the [Kairos North American Youth Culture Newsletter](#).

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[April 2012 - Vol. 59](#)



Defending Religious Freedom

This excerpt is from the recent statement by Evangelicals and Catholics Together entitled, [In Defense of Religious Freedom](#) © 2012. The full statement is published in [First Things](#), March 2012.

Assault on religious freedom

We are ...deeply concerned that religious freedom is under renewed assault around the world. While the threats to freedom of faith, religious practice, and religious participation in public affairs in Islamist and communist states are widely recognized, grave threats to religious freedom have also emerged in the developed democracies. In the West, certain religious beliefs are now regarded as bigoted. Pastors are under threat, both cultural and legal, for preaching biblical truth. Christian social-service and charitable agencies are forced to cease cooperation with the state because they will not bend their work to what Pope Benedict XVI has called the “dictatorship of relativism.”

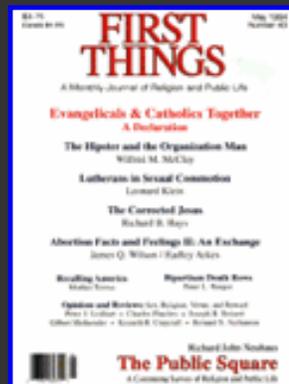
Evangelicals and Catholics Together

Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) is a fellowship of Christian pastors, theologians, and educators in North America. ECT was formed 18 years ago by John Richard Neuhaus and Charles Colson, along with other prominent religious leaders, to deepen the dialogue among their respective Christian communities on issues of common concern, to explore theological common ground, and to offer in public life a common witness born of Christian faith.

Since their founding in 1994, they have addressed together important public policy questions, such as the defense of life, and they have proposed patterns of theological understanding on such long-disputed questions, such as the gift of salvation, the authority of Scripture, and the call to holiness in the communion of saints.

Previous Statements by
Evangelicals and Catholics Together

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The Christian Mission

Proponents of human rights, including governments, have begun to define religious freedom down, reducing it to a bare “freedom of worship.” This reduction denies the inherently public character of biblical religion and privatizes the very idea of religious freedom, a view of freedom such as one finds in those repressive states where Christians can pray only so long as they do so behind closed doors. It is no exaggeration to see in these developments a movement to drive religious belief, and especially orthodox Christian religious and moral convictions, out of public life.

Given these circumstances, we offer this statement, In Defense of Religious Freedom, as a service due to God and to the common good. The God who gave us life gave us liberty. The God who has called us to faith asks that we defend the possibility that others may make similarly free acts of faith. By reaffirming the fundamental character of religious freedom, we contribute to the defense of freedom and to human flourishing, in our countries and throughout the world.

What religious freedom is

As believers in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who reveals himself fully in the Lord Jesus, we find the deepest source of religious freedom in the form or nature of the human person created by God. Human beings have been created with the capacity to know God, the will to seek God, and a spiritual thirst for God. In Genesis 1:26, the Bible teaches us that only human beings are made “in the image of God.” No one bears this image (*imago Dei*) more than others; no one has the right to assert that by reason of race, tribe, ethnicity, class, or sex his imaging of God is superior to another.

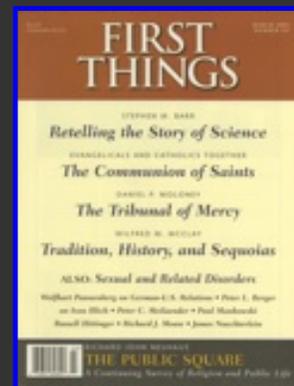
...Human freedom, and especially religious freedom, reflects God’s design for creation and his pattern of redemption. Religious freedom is thus grounded in the character of God as revealed in the Bible and in the moral structure of the world that we can know through reason. It is precisely as Evangelical and Catholic Christians that we affirm, on the authority of the Bible, religious freedom for all, even as we are prepared to defend religious freedom in public life through arguments drawn from reason.

Religious freedom is a fundamental right. As the American founders put it, it is “unalienable.” Religious freedom is thus a right that exists before the state. The just state recognizes this right of persons and protects it in law. In doing so, the state recognizes the limits of its own capacity: It cannot coerce consciences; it cannot compel belief. For the state that recognizes and protects religious freedom is not an omniscient state, but rather a state that acknowledges the rights of conscience and the prerogatives of the institutions that men and women freely sustain to express and pass on their religious convictions. It recognizes its duty to serve, and not to impede, those

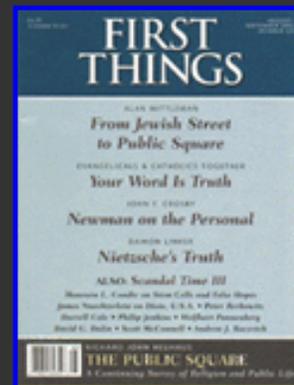
in the Third Millennium
May 1994



The Gift of Salvation
January 1998



The Communion of Saints
March 2003



Your Word Is Truth
January 2005

communities of civil society. Thus the recognition of religious freedom in full is a crucial barrier to the totalitarian temptation that seems to exist in all forms of political modernity.

In sum, religious freedom has both personal and public dimensions. It is grounded in the dignity of the human person as possessed of a thirst for the truth and a capacity to know it. The state that recognizes religious freedom as inherent and inalienable, a civil right protected by law, thereby acknowledges its incompetence over the sanctuary of human conscience. Religious freedom is fundamental both to the freedom of the individual human person and to the sustaining of just and limited governments.

In a world of manifest and innumerable inequalities, this radical equality of all men and women before God is the bond that allows us to speak meaningfully of a human family, a human race, in which we share mutual obligations—including the obligation to recognize and honor that sanctuary of conscience in which each person can meet the divine source of life. Any power, be it cultural or political, that puts unwarranted impediments in the path of the human quest for truth, which culminates in the human quest for God, is violating the order of creation....

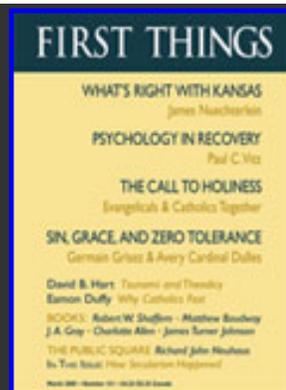
Renewal of religious freedom

We live in the greatest period of persecution in the history of Christianity. In the twentieth century, noble martyrs like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Blessed Jerzy Popieluszko gave their lives for Christ amid a cloud of witnesses greater in number than those martyred for the Name in the previous nineteen centuries of Christian history. That witness continues today in the self-sacrifice of men like Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian cabinet officer murdered because of his defense of the religious freedom of all of his fellow Pakistanis.

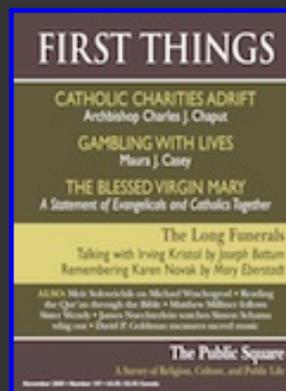
As Evangelicals and Catholics who seek to honor the witness of these and other martyrs, we pledge to work together for the renewal of religious freedom in our countries and around the world. We will resist the legal pressure brought on Christians in the medical profession, the armed forces, and elsewhere to participate in actions that they deem immoral on the grounds of both faith and reason.

We acknowledge that the state enjoys its own sphere of competence. But we remind the modern democratic state that it is a limited state. ... Thus we call on our public officials to undertake prudent measures to advance the cause of religious freedom in full.

In all of this, we believe we are acting as Christians have been commanded to act, and speaking as citizens of mature democracies ought to speak. Our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and our



The Call to Holiness
March 2005



Do Whatever He Tells You:
The Blessed Virgin Mary in
Christian Faith and Life
November 2009



In Defense of Religious
Freedom
March 2012

baptism in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, compels us to defend the religious freedom of all who are created in the image of God. Our gratitude for the religious freedom that has been a hallmark of North America for over two centuries compels us to work to defend religious freedom in the United States and Canada, and to work for the religious freedom of others in all lands.

For the sake of the common good, we, Evangelicals and Catholics Together, urge our fellow citizens and our public officials to join us in the renewal of religious freedom: to defend religious freedom for all persons and to guard against its erosion in our societies.

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