



GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

April 2015



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- A Place To Stand
Page 3
- Good News For
Non-Achievers
Page 5
- Un-Ecclesiastical
Friendship
Page 6
- If God Be For Us
Page 7
- Did You Know
Page 8
- The Postmodern
World
Page 9
- Christian Meditation
Page 12
- To and Fro
Page 14



“A Place To Stand”

CHRIST ALONE • GRACE ALONE • FAITH ALONE • SCRIPTURE ALONE

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EDITORIAL . . .

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8).

Faith, as it is described and illustrated in the Bible, bears an inherent absurdity. Many do not like this aspect of faith and seek to pretend it is not so. Yet, in Hebrews, the secret is out. The ‘cat is out of the bag,’ so to speak. Noah is adduced as a prime exhibit for it. We are reminded that in building the Ark, Noah was acting upon God’s warning about “*things not seen.*” He acted as if the forecast inundation was a foregone conclusion, despite the fact that he had never seen such a thing. Likewise Abraham, when he embarked on his grand adventure. “*He did not know where he was going.*”

Did not God tell him he would give him the land of Canaan for his inheritance? Yes, but when he arrived there, it was not his inheritance and had not become so even at the time of his death. He was a stranger in the land God gave him all his life long. He knew where he was going, but *he did not know where he was going.*

Do I know where I am going? God has said to me and to all his people, “*Fear not little flock, it is the father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom*” (Luke 12:32). I accept it as true, trusting in the one who promised. Yet I do not know from one day to the next what will happen.


Many there are who do claim to know what will happen. Some are sure that God has spoken to them and revealed such secrets; assuring them of good fortune and giving them advance warning of impending dangers.

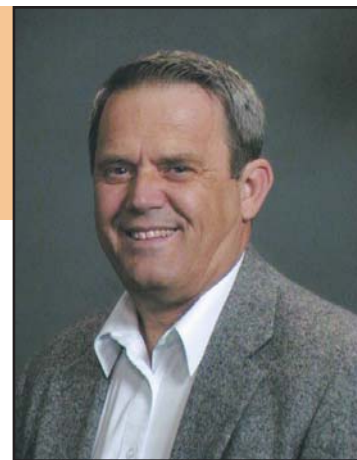
The truth for most believers is more like this: They trust that God is love; they believe themselves to be his children and are confident of life eternal. Yet, for much of the time, they have no idea what God’s provident care will prevent or permit. They

know where they are going, and they do not know where they are going.

To live by faith means both knowing and not knowing at the same time. After a parade of well-known individuals from Israel’s history who typified genuine faith, the pastor to the Hebrew disciples has this: “*All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised*” (Hebrews 11:13).

We might have thought that a Christian tract, making the case for faith in God, would have been more convincing if that bit had been left out. But that would have left unconfessed, too much that is important about faith. The pastor goes further to say:

“*They admitted that they were aliens and strangers on the earth.*” Faith that the Bible teaches admits things. It makes no pretence at having discovered for a smooth, sanitised path through life; free of shocks and hurts. Admitting that we are pilgrims, subject to myriad unknowns, it holds to the goodness and trustworthiness of God, and looks forward to a future in which all will be very well indeed. 



Pastor Ron Allen

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A Place To Stand

By Ron Allen

When Neil Armstrong set foot on the moon, he knew he was part of an event that would reverberate with consequence for future generations of earthlings. His words persist in our collective remembrance: *"One small step for a man, one giant step for mankind."*

Having set forth with eloquence and passion, what was achieved through the Calvary event, Paul explains that God's crediting people with righteousness on ground of their faith in Jesus, is loaded with immense consequence for all people. It was truly, 'one giant step for mankind.'

"Therefore since we have been justified through faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

Peace with God. What is that? And why would anyone care to know? I recently watched the Mayor of Reykjavik (capital city of Iceland), being interviewed. As part of the segment, the Mayor showed the journalist around his city. He took the newsman to the cathedral, an architecturally stunning structure which reflected the grandeur of Iceland's rocky landscape. "That is simply breathtaking," the journalist exclaimed. "Yes, beautiful, but useless," was the Mayor's reply. "It should have been a children's hospital or something just as appropriate."

Woody Allen is reported to have said once: "The problem with God is that he is just not very good at his job." For decades, a growing sector of the West's populations has been trying hard to disinherit its Judeo-Christian roots. Peace with God is not seen as a value worth pursuing. Energy and material means devoted to that end is deemed wasteful; a squandering of precious resources.

So-called superstitions, which framed and steadied society in the past, have, in large measure, been cast aside by modernity. Freedom from the constricting, hindering effect of worrying about what the deity thinks of human beings is seen as a great leap forward.

The trouble is, it turns out that freedom has not come to pass. For men and women, caring not about being right with God, there now looms on the horizon of their consciousness, a complex of expectations and requisite standards which simply must be met if a person is to enjoy approval, be seen as 'in the right' and to be at peace.

In the developed world, human worth is largely measured by criteria of achievement. If you have made a lot of money, you are judged successful. If you are rich, acceptability attaches to you. The wealthiest have their names published in magazine 'rich' lists. Their wisdom being assumed, they are over-represented in government. In a variety of ways they are feted and fawned upon. Gambling, lotteries, quiz shows with monetary prizes are ubiquitous. Together these testify of the great truth of our culture. Namely: there is no worthier goal than material gain, and one is never so 'in the



right' as he who reaches it.

Even though most people are not rich, the implicit message of public discourse is that they ought to be. The same word also issues from many a pulpit. "God doesn't want you to be poor." Testimonies to the effect that "since I came to Jesus, my business has become more

profitable" add weight to the doctrine. Despite the fact that the majority of the world's believers are poor, their testimony is not called for, and many among them fall prey to the discouraging thought that God has not accepted them. They are not in the right.

Upward mobility is the appropriate professional trajectory in society driven by secular values. A person who hasn't made it yet will be granted an indulgence just so long as he is on the way up.

A youth drops out of school and begins earning as a process worker, a janitor, an agricultural laborer or a waiter. Even though his work costs him much more of his physical self than is asked for in the professions he is not viewed as an achiever. He fails to meet an accepted standard for success. The social signals convince him that he is a marginal figure. He's not in the right.

A girl goes to college. She is intelligent, attractive and decent. She enjoys socializing with boys and looks forward to going steady with someone. She is disappointed though, to find that boys want to engage with her sexually—almost immediately, and they quickly lose interest in her when they learn she is not interested in 'casual' sex.

Over time, she begins to feel rejected. She wants to love and be loved. She feels herself a failure as a young woman because she is not valued on the terms required by boys she meets and knows. At last, hungry for acceptance she gives herself to a young man, but is plunged into despair afterward when she realizes how little he cared about HER as a person. Her anxiety and craving to be prized now grows more intense. She goes from one sexual encounter to another and each one is followed by an even more acute sensation of being devalued, of not being worthy to be treasured.

Here is a school boy who is shy and awkward. Classmates make fun of him. Some mock him to his face; others lampoon him on social media. He knows he doesn't belong. He wants social acknowledgment and reception so much, but he doesn't fit the bill. He's not in the right. The more he feels this the more withdrawn he becomes, and the more he is bullied on social media. One night, in his room at home, he can't take it anymore. He ends his own life.

Many a man, who finds himself unemployed and no longer able to keep a roof over the head of his wife and children, feels

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that society does not accept him. Many a man coming to the end of his working life and realizing he has not attained his own goals—let alone the benchmarks set for him by society—is convinced he has not made the grade. He has fallen short of a permissible minimum requirement.

Many a man, having devoted the greater part of his time and energy to his profession, and finding suddenly that his kids have all grown up and left feels himself a disaster as a father and an all-round loser as a person.

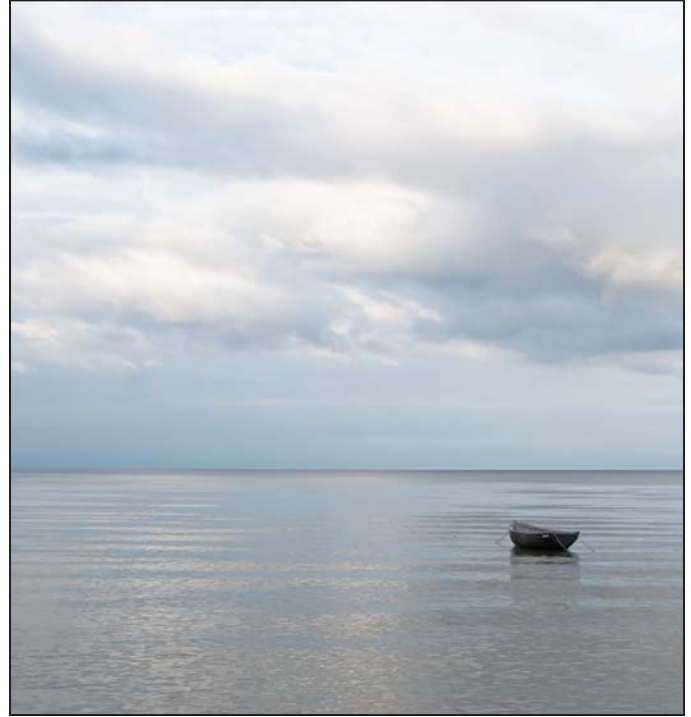
Many a woman feels condemned because she leaves her children in child-care while she goes to work every day. Many a girl feels she is not pretty enough. She is convinced of her intrinsic wrongness because her mother never once approved of her dress, her hair, her manner, or her friends. She sees herself as an outcast and it will always be so.

Many a man, many a woman, experience guilt for not being strong enough, not smart enough. There are persons who know the bitter taste of social isolation because they are too fat, not athletic enough, or not svelte enough to live among the bold and the beautiful.

In the brave new world where peace with God is no longer needful, men and women are nonetheless plagued by regret and alienation. They long for peace. Peace with themselves and with each other. A great deal of psychological capital is consumed in the quest for acceptance, the right look, being presentable, satisfactory or cool. For many, the effort proves futile and life is an exhausting struggle to measure up; to be found 'in the right.'

In Romans, Paul discusses a primary and archetypal rightness that issues in profound peace—peace with God. Think of Christ's disciples, caught in a storm on the lake. They worry, they fear, they pull desperately at the oars, but they are sinking. Then, Jesus stands up and says to the storm: Peace! And a great calm ensues.

Peace with God is the mother of all peace because it is not the result of humans pulling harder at the oar of their lives. It is supplied by God, and speaks of his attitude to people, not



theirs to him. Paul elaborates: He says *"through Christ we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand"* (Romans 5:2). Access! This word is descriptive of a worshiper entering the Jewish temple; of the high privilege of approaching the sacred presence and not being rebuffed. Such is the believer's privilege in the gospel. We are at home with God. It is where we stand.

Unlike at work: one day you are the boss's shiny-haired boy; he's all over you like a rash. The next day he bawls you out in front of the whole staff. Unlike the world of public life, politics and entertainment: one day you are flavor-of-the-month, next, no one wants to know you. Peace with God is a condition of established and enduring approval. Not intermittent, not sporadic or probationary. It's permanent residency: citizenship, belonging.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:6-8).

We men and women will, under some circumstances, think it worthwhile to give our life for a 'good' person. 'Good' is generic. We imagine a class of humans who merit our sacrifice. Human love is always a bargain. We expect a return for our investment. God's love is unique in that he gives himself for the ungodly, for sinners, for morally weak, defeated souls; people who do not love God, who resist him and defy him. God gives himself for them.

To entrust oneself to a God like that is to enter into a sphere of safety, completeness, and wholeness that is not the product of our achievement. It is a colossal peace that cannot be disrupted by human treachery. It is a bedrock platform of →



Good News for Non-Achievers

By Anthony Campolo

Christianity provides an alternative to the threats of failure that loom so large in our success-hungry society. There is deliverance from the fears that sap the joy from living. The gospel is the good news that there is another option which keeps the success game from being the only game in town. When we become Christians, we invite Jesus to be the Significant Other in our lives. We allow him to displace the generalized, the other in the language of Mead; or the world, in the language of the Scriptures. To be *Christian* means that we seek his approval and learn to count what the world says about us as secondary. It is difficult to please both Jesus and the generalized other at the same time.

When we orient ourselves to Jesus, seeking to gain his approval, we will discover that we are accepted just as we are. Jesus does not require some great achievement before he affirms our worth.

We don't have to work to gain positions of privilege at his right hand, for he has already declared us to heirs of God and joint heirs with him. It is difficult for North Americans to believe these truths because of the idea that success is competitively earned. We find it hard to be the heirs of spiritual wealth, power and prestige. We want to do something wonderful for God, to be deserving of these things. We go through life tortured by the belief that we have not done enough to be worthy of his approval, in spite of the fact he tells

us we are approved by him because of what his Son has done on our behalf. This is the meaning of grace—approval and loving acceptance by God without having to achieve anything.


-Anthony Campolo: THE SUCCESS FANTASY.
pp. 23, 24. 



righteousness (in the rightness) not conferred by society, colleagues or family. No matter if I am discredited, blackballed, denounced or shunned, I am still in the right in an ultimate sense. *"Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies"* (Romans 8:33).

Inasmuch as many in our fast-paced, achievement-driven, competitive society feel that they are not up to scratch, that they haven't or can't make it, that they are not desired, and not welcome. Righteousness—being right with God and having peace with God—is an enormously requisite circumstance for the human spirit. Being ever so apt, peace with God provides solid ground for men and women to stand on. Peace with God is an extraordinarily encouraging environment to live out of.

That which makes me worthwhile is not my success in business, in work, in my profession. My ethical and religious triumphs or lapses do not define me. I have a value drawn not from things about me which are seen as notable, great or cool. I have value because God values me. When all is said and done, I am worth a great deal because God accepts me. He has credited me with his own rightness. I am a receiver, a beneficiary.

My life has meaning and consequence whether society celebrates me or disregards me. Even if I disgrace myself at home, at school, at work or at my church, there is no reason for me to despise myself or to give up. Christ has gathered me into himself where I am pleasing to God. I have peace with him. He treasures me. And I am loved. 

What is the actual state of mind of the 'justified' person? He has disowned, not merely certain evil practices, but his own guilty self. That is implied in the act of faith in Christ. He is crucified with Christ. So far as the whole intention of his mind is concerned, that guilty self is dead and done with. The controlling factor in the situation is the power and love of God as revealed in Christ and his 'righteous act.' That is the center about which the whole being moves in the moment of faith. Outwardly, he is the same man he was, open still to his neighbor's harsh judgment, liable still to condemnation under a law which balances achievement against shortcoming. Really the man is changed through and through. In fact, he is righteous in a fresh sense of the word; in a sense in which righteousness is no longer, so to say, quantitative but qualitative; in which it consists not in a preponderant balance of good deeds achieved, but in a comprehensive attitude of mind and will. If our highest values are personal values, then at bottom a man is right or wrong according to his relation to the personal center of reality, which is God.

C.H. Dodd: THE MEANING OF PAUL FOR TODAY,
PP. 121, 122.

Un-ecclesiastical Friendship

By Leslie D. Weatherhead

I do not know how Jesus dressed, but it is very doubtful whether he and his followers were ecclesiastically garbed every day. His scornful reference to the emphasis of the Rabbis on their use of big phylacteries (Matthew 23:5) makes it very doubtful if he wore the same uniform.

Jesus got into trouble because his disciples were so un-ecclesiastical and so unconventional. The disciples of John came to Jesus saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast regularly and your disciples do not?" Jesus' answer is amazing if we rob it of its familiarity. "Can the sons of the bride chamber mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" (Matthew 9:15). No other religious teacher in world history has ever likened himself to a bridegroom, or the conditions he came to bring about to a wedding. See what joy the Christian religion should mean—a perpetual wedding!

I only quote these stories to show that the impact that Jesus and his disciples made on the life of their day was far from being anything like the impact made by any other religious sects. What in ecclesiastical circles was the conventional thing, the accepted thing, the 'done' thing, Jesus and his men did *not* do.

I do not think there is the slightest doubt that Jesus, so far from being an ascetic, thoroughly enjoyed going to parties, and I imagine that he was the life and soul of any party that he attended. We call him the 'Man of Sorrows' but we forget that he was also the Man of Joys. The sorrows are *our* sorrows. Joy is what he came to bring. Let those who think that religion is long-faced, frustrating, joyless and solemn; remember that Jesus was so fond of parties that they called him "a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, the friend of publicans and sinners."

"The most glorious slander," wrote T.R. Glover, "that ever oozed from slimy lips."

When we turn to Christ's words to individuals, we get clearer evidence still of his ecclesiastical unconventionality. Remember the story of Zacchaeus? Jesus did not loom up into the branches of the tree and, seeing Zacchaeus, stop and say, "Brother, are you saved?" He said, "Can I come and have supper with you?" Not a religious sentence at all.

Turn your mind if you will to the lovely story of the woman by the well, and let me build up for you the kind of house-that-Jack-built-argument that may help us to see it as it really was. Do you realize that in Jesus' day a Jewish man would not speak

out of doors to a Jewish woman if he knew her, not even if she were his mother or sister? For a Jewish man to talk to a Jewish woman he did not know was incredible. For a Jewish man to talk to a Samaritan woman was outside the bounds of decency: but here is a Jewish Rabbi talking to a Samaritan woman of doubtful reputation. The thing was an outrage.

Here again we note a restraint in the gospels that blinds us to the real situation. We read, "The disciples marvelled that he was speaking with a woman." One wishes that one knew all they said to one another. And if we have time to go through that conversation of Jesus, we should see it in all its freedom from professionalism and ecclesiasticism. Jesus did not open it by saying, "I do not think I have seen you in church lately." He said, "Would you mind giving me a drink of water?" And the most marvellous revelation of the nature of God was the crown of a conversation that started like that.

Where is all this leading us? It is leading us to recognize that if Jesus came to your house he would talk like that to you. He would not resort to the kind of pious jargon and the use of clichés and devotional language that put so many people off. He would not ask you if you were 'washed in the blood of the lamb' or 'saved by grace' or 'justified by faith' or a recipient of the 'second blessing.' He would not self-consciously be trying to do you good. Nor would he *try* to see something loveable about you. He would like you. He would not *try* to like you. He would like *you*.

I do not mean to suggest by that that Jesus would like everybody. He would *love* everybody in the sense of showing them endless goodwill, but there were some who were too

proud, too hypocritical, too blind, to meet him on any pathway or any common ground: but I am talking about Jesus and you.

Look at Jesus, the Jesus of the gospels, Jesus undisguised by ecclesiasticism, Jesus unhindered by the arguments with which men have furnished him, hoping to make you believe in him, the Jesus who would like you immediately and make a pathway which would bring you to his feet. 'He is his own best evidence,' and if once you see him he will do the rest.

I remember being in a Fellowship Group in which a man said, "I suppose Jesus would look for something lovable in everybody." I let the phrase pass, but I squirmed →



If God Be For Us

By Joseph Shaw

If justification is to mean anything at all it must reach me where I live and work. If it is just a Sunday doctrine, part of the mental furniture that goes with the visible church furniture, it will remain imprisoned within a special set of 'religious' associations. The gospel never intends that theology be kept separate from daily life. Luther encourages us to glory in our calling, our vocation, and within that vocation realize the full possibilities of being free children of God.

Take the case of a high school student. The "law of achievement", which permeates our culture tells the high school youth that he will be justified in the future, for then he will accomplish something for which he will be recognized. For the present time he is "only" a student. The best he can hope for is a good record which will qualify him for entrance to a good college which in turn will prepare him for a well-paying job, and eventually society will take notice that he has made the grade.

The gospel, as God's power for salvation, sets the student free as one who is *now* justified in the sight of God and, we must be sure to add, in the sight of the community of believers. Now, right now, our high school friend is one whose life has validity, and not just because he serves as an acolyte on Sunday morning. Not because he one of the officers in the church's youth group. It is as a young man or a young lady whose calling is that of a high school student. God justifies the



specific existence of this young person. God bestows meaning and worth upon this young life here and now in his calling as a high school student.

Each of us can adapt the illustration to himself. The temptation is to conclude from the message of justification that God justifies us in our role as faithful church members or with respect to special spiritual problems.

The glory of justification is that God justifies us as insurance salesmen, as housewives, as business executives, as

Continued on next page

under it. How would you like somebody going about 'looking for something lovable in you'? How would you like a man to nudge his friend and say, "There must be something likeable in him and I am determined to look for it?" Such an attitude would have just the wrong kind of effect on and a lot like me.

I felt sympathetic with a youngster who heard and evangelist say, "We must capture our young people," and who replied, "If he tries to capture me, I'll give him a run for his money." O this terrible desire to do people good for our own satisfaction; this awful tyranny of the super-ego by which, without speaking, we adopt an attitude which says, "Come, and be like me." To which in their hearts people reply, "From ever being anything like you, may your own God deliver me." I must confess that I squirm before militant evangelists determined to on hanging the scalps of lovable pagans on their girdles, and who clank around with strained expressions, determined to do their reluctant fellows good, and whose very footfall is a rebuke.

I have great sympathy also with the poor woman living in the slums trying to bring up her children, and continually having her time wasted and her temper strained by an official visitor from the church. At last, exasperated beyond endurance, the woman wrote to the Vicar and said, "Dear Sir, for God's sake stop Miss So-and-so saving her soul on me."

That mother would have loved Jesus. He would have been so different. He would not psycho-analyse people without their

own expressed desire. He would not winkle their secrets out of them or pry into their private sins.

Let us believe in friendship for friendship's sake. We all dislike the person who tries to make friends with a rich man in the hope of some personal gain, or with a society woman for the sake of some social advantage. In the same way, let us be careful that our praiseworthy zeal to make converts does not make our attitude objectionable to the millions who are hungry of love.

I do not think Jesus would be friends with people just in order to do them good or to get them to come to church. He would make friends for friendship's sake because he is a friendly person and because his love has love's motive and no other. As dear Old Dick Sheppard used to say, "It is not my business to make people good. It is my business to make myself and to make other people happy if I can."

Men are suspicious of calculated bargains, as well they might be. The redeeming factor in life is love expressing itself in friendship that does not count the cost and is not always reckoning up what the reward or the response will be. Hold on to that idea. The redeeming factor in life is love, not ethics, not theology, nor even our example. Certainly not the attitude which says, "Come and be like me!" Just love for love's sake.

-Leslie D. Weatherhead: THAT IMMORTAL SEA, pp.72-79. 

Continued from previous page

department store clerks, as delivery boys, as high school principals, as astronauts, as custodians—as whatever we are and do in the normal pursuits of daily existence, but let us be careful lest we empty the glory of justification by tacking on a condition to the effect that God justifies the outstanding performers only. That would lead us straight back to the “law of achievement” from which we have been delivered.

One doesn't need to know much psychology to realize that dissatisfaction with oneself is a common source of personal unhappiness. The hardest misfortunes to bear are those in which we are convinced that we have failed. The basketball player who fails to make the crucial free-throw finds it hard to live with himself for a few days. The housewife whose dessert turns out to be a mess is not consoled when the guests praise the tenderness of the roast. The conscientious parent is more disturbed by his own loss of self-control in berating the children than by the minor mischief they have been up to.

All of these disruptions, trivial as they are, have a way of causing us to ask just what sort of persons we are. The anguish within is really a longing for justification, an unuttered cry for someone to assure us that we still count, that our foolishness has not destroyed our validity as persons, our right to be!

Faith, which is never easy, is equal to such moments because God in Christ justifies the ungodly. We need not look for the basis of justification in ourselves or our performance because it lies outside of ourselves, in Jesus Christ and his faithfulness. **Therefore, the claim that Christ is the content of justification is not just conventional religious language. It means that my own life is in vital connection with the greatest life ever lived. By faith, I share in everything Jesus was and did.**

Orthodox theologians of past centuries have said that God *imputes* (transfers) the righteousness of Christ to the believing sinner. The trouble with this approach is that Christ is pictured as one whose moral perfection before the law is transferred to us. The imputation of righteousness, seen in this way means

that it is the law, after all, which is the sovereign norm for all mankind. Even when we are justified through Christ, the ultimate significance of justification is that we are squared with the law.

There is greater power in the gospel than that! The work of Jesus Christ does not reach its high point in the satisfaction of the demands of the law. It culminates, rather, in the victory of Christ over sin, death, and all evil powers, and the victory is shared by the followers of Christ. As Paul writes in Romans 8:32, “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?” The powers of the resurrection, the powers of the new age, the creative powers of new life, are offered to those who are justified by faith in Christ. It is on this side of the resurrection that Christ becomes the content of our justification.

What does this suggest as to the meaning of my life? It suggests a dimension of justification that is waiting to be claimed and enjoyed, namely, the dimension of corporate Christian experience. In justification I meet my brother because Christ has ruled out works and achievements as the basis on which we come together.

In the fellowship of the church there is a welcome for the non-achievers, the inferiority complexes, the timid, the non-talented, but that is not all. These same people—and we are among them—receive something in the fellowship. They receive dignity, worth, standing, validity. It will even happen that once liberated from the depressing law of achievement, we discover that by God's grace we *can* do something, we can contribute to the building up of the body.

The justified man, no longer frantic about earning acceptance, is now gloriously free to serve his neighbor and his world. Justification has delivered him from blustering self-assertion and cringing self-pity. In faith he has everything, so he is free to love. And in the practice of love he discovers, without looking for it, the meaning of his life.

—Joseph Shaw: IF GOD BE FOR US, pp. 102-107. 

Did You Know?

Did you know that Christian leaders in Liberia, meeting in response to the deadly Ebola epidemic in West Africa, have claimed that “immoral acts” are responsible for the outbreak? At a meeting of the Liberian Council of Churches, leaders issued a statement saying that “God is angry with Liberia. Liberians have to pray and seek God's forgiveness over the corruption and immoral acts that continue to penetrate our society.” They recommended that everyone stay indoors for three days of fasting and prayer.

The belief that Ebola is a sign of God's wrath is shared by some evangelicals in developed countries. “Bring on the Ebola virus” says one website. “God does not exist to give us what we want, and if killing off our loved ones is going to help realize this, then this is what he will do.”

This kind of response to disaster is reminiscent of reactions to other disasters in recent times such as Hurricane Sandy, the Asian Tsunami in 2004, and Hurricane Katrina which was blamed on everything from abortion to homosexuality to antagonism to Islam and insufficient support for the state of Israel.

Recently Christian radio host, Rick Wiles, warned “If Ebola becomes a global plague you better make sure the blood of Jesus is upon you, you better make sure you have been marked by the angels so that you are protected by God.”

NOTE: *As is the case in West Africa today, those who suffer most from epidemics, plagues and other catastrophic events in nature, are often people with the least resources at their disposal to combat disease and disaster—the poor. Is it possible that God is angrier with the poor than with the privileged of the world? We think not. In fact, Scripture teaches the very opposite. It is misguided to use calamity as a sign by which it is possible to tell who God is angry with and who he is pleased with.* —Editors

The Postmodern World

By Kurt Struckmeyer

The world in which we live is changing. For the past three hundred years, we have been part of an age called *modernity*. The modern age is now giving way to a postmodern age. This transformation will change how people view the world, how they understand reality and truth, and how they approach the fundamental questions of life.

This will have a tremendous impact on Christianity. The Church has its roots in an ancient pre-modern, Mediterranean worldview. Slowly it has accommodated itself to the modern world. But many critics wonder whether it will be able to survive the shift to the postmodern age.

THE PRE-MODERN WORLDVIEW

The pre-modern worldview developed during the time of the ancient temple-state, in which an alliance of king and priesthood closely intertwined religion and political power. Religion's role was to legitimize the king's rule by providing a moral and religious authority for his decrees. The king was viewed as God's representative on earth. He was sometimes spoken of as the "Son of God" (as was ancient Israel's King David, and was sometimes seen as divine himself. To these ancient societies the ruler and the social order reflected the will of God on earth.

The pre-modern worldview is thus characterized by and unquestioning acceptance of authority and belief in absolute truths. Pre-modern people believe what they are told by authority figures, both religious and secular. They trust religion to provide the answer to life's mysteries.

The Bible is a product of two pre-modern societies. The priests of ancient Israel produced the Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament, and evangelists of early Christian communities produced the New Testament. The pre-modern view of the world represented in these documents was accepted without question by the audiences to which they were written.

THE MODERN WORLDVIEW

The modern worldview began in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Modernity was founded on the pursuit of objective knowledge and the scientific method. It is characterized by a questioning of authority and tradition. Modernity believes that truth is based on facts. In the modern worldview, people should believe only what they can observe. Modernity trusts the power of reason and critical thinking to solve the world's problems. It looks to science, and not to religion, to provide the answers to life's mysteries. Modern

people have often developed an optimistic faith in the progress of humanity through knowledge, scientific enquiry, innovation, invention, and rational thought.

SECULARISM

The rise of modernism led to the rise of secularism. The two go hand in hand. Secularism is defined as system of ideas or practices that rejects the primacy of religion in our corporate life. In its hardest form, secularism is atheistic. It denies the reality of God. In its softer, more widespread form, it accepts God's reality, but rejects the church as a controlling force in the life of the national community. It believes that the church and state should be separate entities in modern life. This

doesn't mean that individual faith cannot inform our politics; it simply means that the state should not sponsor a particular religion and give it preferential treatment and power. In this sense, the Founding Fathers of the United States were secularists.

FUNDAMENTALISM

As modernity developed and spread, an intense reaction developed among religious traditionalists firmly entrenched in a pre-modern worldview, primarily within the religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

Beginning nearly three hundred years ago, European biblical scholars began to question the literal truth of the biblical accounts, both in the Old and New Testaments.

Nothing was considered sacred. The virgin birth of Jesus, his miracles, and his resurrection were all subjected to scrutiny and question. The doubts posed by modern philosophers, biblical scholars, and theologians threatened traditional religious dogma.

As a result, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century's, reactionary religious movements tried to reinforce traditional religious fundamentals and re-establish belief in the literal truth of the biblical stories.

If modernity wanted to deal with factuality, the fundamentalists responded in kind. They were not content to simply say that the Bible expressed eternal truths or that its stories were metaphorically true. Now they demanded that Christians accept Scripture as factually and literally true. Even

Continued on next page



Continued from previous page

texts that for centuries had been regarded as metaphorical, now assumed the status of factuality.

By the 1920's, the pre-modern worldview of the fundamentalists came into increasing conflict with modern secular thought. The clash between the two sides created a crisis in the church, particularly over the theory of evolution and the literal acceptance of the creation account in Genesis. The 1925 Scopes "Monkey Trial" was a public battle between these two competing positions and marked the transition point at which modernity became the new majority worldview in American society. Over eighty years later, Christian fundamentalists continue to demand that public school districts teach the parable of creation as "creation science alongside the theory of evolution.

THE CHURCH IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

The modern worldview is not in the majority everywhere. On a worldwide basis, Christianity continues to embrace a pre-modern worldview. In the Global South (the areas we often call the Third World) huge and growing Christian populations—currently 480 million in Latin America, 360 million in Africa, and 313 million in Asia (compared with 260 million in North America)—now make up what the Catholic scholar Walbert Buhlmann has called the *Third Church*. It is a form of Christianity as distinct as Protestantism or Orthodoxy, and one that is likely to become the dominant Christian faith on the globe.

There is increasing tension between what one might call a Liberal Northern Reformation, in which many U.S. and European churches have embraced modernity, and a conservative, Southern Counter-Reformation, in which the Third World churches are staunchly pre-modern. The church in the Global South is unfortunately dominated by the pre-modern institution of patriarchy with all of its negative implications, including subjugation of women and abhorrence of gays. An enormous rift seems inevitable, and global denominations spend enormous effort and time calling for unity while seemingly irreconcilable theological differences drive the two factions apart.

In the twenty-first century, Christians are facing a shrinking population in the "Liberal West" and a growing majority in the "Conservative Rest." During the past half-century, the critical centers of the Christian world have moved decisively to Africa, to Latin America, and to Asia, and the balance will never shift back.

The growth in Africa has been relentless. In 1900, Africa



had just 10 million Christians out of a continental population of 107 million—about nine percent. Today, the Christian

total stands at 360 million out of 784 million, or 46 percent. And, that percentage is likely to continue rising, because Christian African countries have some of the world's most dramatic rates of population growth. Meanwhile, the advanced industrial countries are experiencing a dramatic birth dearth.

Within the next twenty-five years, the population of the world's Christians is expected to grow to 2.6 billion (making Christianity by far the world's largest faith). By 2025, 50 percent of the Christian population will be in Africa and Latin America, and another 17 percent will be in Asia. These proportions will grow steadily. By about 2050, the United States will still have the largest single contingent of Christians, but all the other leading nations will be Southern—Mexico, Brazil, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, and the Philippines. By then, the proportion of non-Latino whites among the world's Christians will have fallen to perhaps one in five.

The vast majority of Christians remain divided into pre-modern and modern camps. Yet, while these two worldviews continue to spar, a new group of people in the industrial West has declared them both irrelevant.

THE POSTMODERN WORLDVIEW

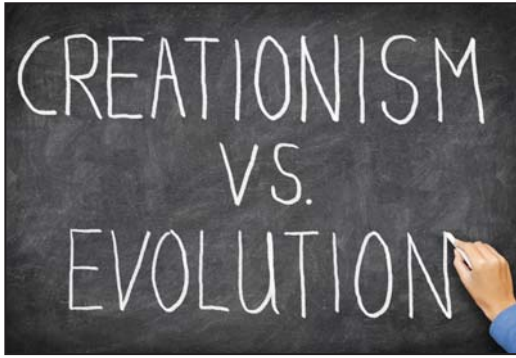
A new historical epoch is unfolding before our eyes. It began about the middle of the twentieth century and is continuing to develop today. For lack of the better designation it is being called postmodernism—the successor of modernism. We are not sure how it will play out in the long-term, but some initial observations are being made about its nature.

Post-modernity is a different reaction to modernity. Postmodern people are essentially disenchanted modernists. They are convinced that human cleverness and reason cannot achieve the happiness we seek. They have witnessed the environmental ravages of the industrial revolution, the bloody history of the twentieth century, and continued misery, poverty and hunger around the globe. None of these problems were solved by scientific knowledge. On the contrary, the by-products of science and the industrial revolution exacerbated many of our human problems. Science has provided cures to disease, but it has also created the threat of global warming and nuclear annihilation. In fact, the bombing of Hiroshima and the resulting nuclear arms race may have been the spark that marked the demise of modernity and ignited the rapid rise of postmodern culture.

But, unlike fundamentalism, postmodernism does not seek to return to an earlier time. Nor does it see a return to authoritarian religion as the answer. Postmodernism characterized by the belief that both religion and science have failed us. Neither can be trusted to provide the answers to life's mysteries or to solve life's perplexing problems.

TRUTH AND EXPERIENCE

Postmodern people reject the notion of absolute truth. They no longer trust authority and they reject any institution that claims to have a claim on the truth. They have become highly suspicious of facts. They believe that all truth, even to some—→



extent scientific knowledge, is subjective, biased, and socially constructed. Truth depends on what one's culture regards as truth. Therefore, the truth is not really true.

In the postmodern worldview, people become their own authority and accept only what they personally experience. There is a sense that feeling is all that counts because, in the end, feeling is all there is. The postmodern attitude is, "If I feel it, if I can touch it, then it must be true."

Among postmoderns there is a pervasive cultural pessimism that is cynical about political and ideological grandstanding of authorities and institutions. In a century of bombs, holocausts and ecological disasters, many people have become disillusioned with their inherited faiths, the institutional church, political parties, and the political process. In the United States, Watergate and the Vietnam War created a pervasive anti-institutional mood among Baby-Boomers, and it has spread to their children. As a result, voter apathy is on the rise and church membership is on the decline.

Generation Xers are deeply suspicious of grand claims. They see life as complex and they distrust simple solutions. Churches which claim they have the last and final word on everything will find it very hard to attract this generation who cannot believe that there is just 'one way for all.' They will look at Christianity as one of the many options that can be considered in a world in which they see each person as finding his or her own truth and meaning.

THE X-FILES

In the 1990's, the TV program "*The X-Files*" contrasted the modern and postmodern paradigms. FBI agent Dana Scully, played by Gillian Anderson, was the epitome of the modern scientific approach to life. Agent Mulder Fox, played by David Duchovny, however, was a postmodern person who cautioned us to "trust no one" in authority and to believe that, although we do not yet fully comprehend it, "the truth is out there." Whereas Scully trusted her head, Mulder trusted only his experience.

THE ROOTS OF POSTMODERNISM

The movement from modernity to postmodernity in America began with the Baby-Boomers. Born between 1946 and 1964, this was the first generation raised under the threat of nuclear weapons. Boomers knew in their guts that science had created a demon that could destroy the world. They saw their school and church basements filled with civil defense emergency supplies, they practiced ineffective "duck and cover" drills in classrooms, and they listened to their parents discuss the need

for backyard fallout shelters.

In the 1960's, they observed the unmasking of the entrenched racism, sexism and militarism that pervaded American culture. And they reacted to it with protests and social action. The only authority figures that they trusted were assassinated—first John Kennedy in 1963, and then Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy in 1968. In all of these, they saw the traditional church as a complicit conspirator with the prevailing societal powers in a culture of rigid moralism, oppression, and violence.

The Baby Boom generation began a search for a more authentic faith, away from authoritarian religion and toward experiential spirituality. Their suspicion towards pre-packaged truths of religious institutions led them to seek spirituality in many new forms—charismatic Christianity, Eastern religions, and New Age Spirituality.

When the Baby Boomers had children their sons and daughters exhibited the same characteristics—but to an even greater degree. The attitudes and traits that are attributed to Generation X, born between 1965 and 1981, are often precisely those that researchers have identified as typical of the Baby Boomer generation. The difference lies in that the young men and women of Generation X have held these values from childhood. Generation Y, born after 1982, are carrying these ideas even further.

Observers are discovering that this shift in attitudes is indicative of a fundamental change around the globe. In many respects, Europeans are ahead of Americans in the move to postmodernity. The abandonment of traditional Christianity is certainly much stronger there.


COEXISTENCE

Historical epochs are not neatly separated. They are not lined up end to end. It is possible to continue to live in an era that is essentially over.

While era prevails, its successor is already forming, and its predecessor continues to exert influence for a very long time.

These three worldviews—pre-modern, modern, and postmodern—co-exist side by side today in all parts of American culture. But it is particularly apparent in our churches. Some Christians accept what they are told by religious authorities. Others question authority and use reason as a guide. Still others reject institutional religion and trust only their own spiritual experiences. But regardless of generation, culture, or attitude, we are all moving together toward a postmodern world. And the movement is rapidly accelerating.

-Kurt Struckmeyer: www.followingjesus.org

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Christian Meditation

By Bruce Burgess

“Ommm-mani-pand-me-hum.” This is a meditative chant that I used back in the days when I was a part-time, fly-by-the-seat-of-my-pants practitioner of Hinduism. My formative teen years were spent in the sixties when hippies were alive and well and I was one of them, and attracted to Eastern Mysticism.



It was in the sixties that Eastern Mysticism gained traction in North America. It was different from organized religion, and many people were rejecting those institutions. It was popularized by the Beatles. They went to India to meet with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, the founder of TM—Transcendental Meditation. Meditation was a big deal back then, and it remains so for many today.

I am aware that when the word *meditation* is used in the church it can make people nervous. They assume it is an Eastern practice; from another religion and therefore bad. But meditation as it is in the East is not related to Christian meditation. Meditation was practiced by the people of Israel. King David for example, 500 years before Buddhism or Hinduism were invented.

It is important to understand that meditation has always stood as a classical and central part of Christian devotion. In Psalm 1, we are told that one who meditates on God’s law is blessed and will prosper. Meditation is a spiritual practice by which we seek to enter more deeply into God’s word and be open to learning and discovery.

This is quite different from the kind of meditation espoused in Eastern religion. **Eastern meditation** is an attempt to empty the mind. **Christian meditation** is an attempt to fill the mind with God. The goal of Eastern religion is detachment for its own sake. **Christian meditation** seeks to detach from the confusion, noise and distractions of the world in order to have a richer attachment to God. Christian meditation is not about

achieving some kind of spiritual ecstasy, but the opening of our mind and spirit to hear God speaking into our lives.

The Psalmist sets before us a reality; a reality that requires choice and action and discipline on our part. We are told not to “*walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers*” (Psalm 1:1). To put this in our present-day context, we need to *choose* what values we are going to follow. There are lots of people in our world whose values differ dramatically from ours. We need to be careful that we are not unduly influenced by them.

We have been influenced by our culture; sometimes in subtle ways, sometimes in dramatic ways. This was a big problem for the Israelites. When they became too involved with the neighboring nations, they often adopted some of their customs, which invariably led them away from God.

In those days, everyone was religious. There were no atheists. In order to explain what they did not understand and could not control, nations invented gods for all kinds of things. Israel was influenced by them and their beliefs. Today, we are influenced by people that worship money and power and success and pleasure. We need to guard against being influenced by their values.



The Psalmist warns against the actions of those who will be “*blown away like chaff*” (Psalm 1:4). The best defence against this outcome is to be proactive, to regularly meditate on the word of God. The Jews were very wise in this regard. After receiving the Ten Commandments, the nation was given a directive:

“*Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates*” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).



In other words, keep these commands ever before you as reminders of the ways God wants you to behave. It was a very literal ‘in-your-face’ thing.

Today, we have unprecedented access to the word of God; bibles, computers, phones, and the internet. We can access the Scriptures more easily than at any other time in history. Yet, this present generation of churchgoers is largely biblically illiterate. People go to church, say they are Christ followers, say they want to grow in faith, and virtually ignore the best resource we have been given!

Meditating on Scripture is more than just reading it. Sometimes I think we have a kind of superstition about Scripture: that if we read enough of it, it will sink into our hearts. But we need to do more than read. We need to understand what we read. We need to think about it, study it, so that Scripture can be a conduit through which we hear the voice of God.

I have heard people say that we should just read the Bible as it was written without adding our own interpretations. The reality is that no one can read Scripture without some bias. You have heard of something called “proof-texting.” This is where someone takes a text out of context and twists its meaning to further their agenda. I would suggest that many TV preachers have twisted Scripture to justify their ‘health and wealth’ gospel which actually contradicts the teachings of Jesus, but furthers their own financial interests.

Meditating on Scripture or on God in Christ opens our minds to God’s influence. In Israel, there came a time when they demanded to have a king to serve rather than resting in God’s rule over them. God, the invisible One wasn’t enough. They wanted a visible representation like the other nations. They reasoned: If they have a king, we should have a king. In this way, they would not have to go before God alone; they could deal with his representative—and representatives can be ignored or manipulated. Such an approach saves the need for change, because to be in God’s presence is to invite change. Christian meditation threatens us because it boldly calls us to enter the presence of the living God and be open to whatever he wants to do with us or in us. That is risky business! It is often why our prayers are a list of things we want rather than openness to what God wants. The motivation to meditate is the desire to know God more fully.

One of the practices we have adopted at our Council meetings is to begin with meditating on a passage of Scripture. Each of us takes a few minutes with a short passage of Scripture, and we listen to God for words to underline or ideas

that speak to us. Then we share them in the larger group. It is amazing how rich this experience is. We not only discover from others, truths we did not notice, but almost without exception, later in the meeting, the Scriptures address some issue we are discussing. That assures us that God is present, guiding us.

The Psalmist tells us: “Those who delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on his law day and night, are like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.”

It reminds us of Jesus when he was speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well. Speaking of the ‘literal’ water in the well, Jesus said, *“Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed the water I give them will become in them a spring of water, welling up to eternal life”* (John 4:13, 14).

Depth of faith does not happen automatically. Just as an athlete or musician cannot attain a significant level of proficiency at their craft without hours of practice, neither can we as followers of Jesus attain maturity without consistent effort.

For some, that sounds like hard work. We have important things to do, people to see, TV programs to watch. We often fit God into our schedules when we can. I’m not saying that morning devotions aren’t beneficial. But a three minute read is not enough. It’s not enough for serious growth. The truth is, the more we connect with the God, the deeper we go, the deeper our joy will be.

When we engage in Christian meditation, we are like trees planted beside streams of water; healthy, growing and dynamic. If you have seen a tree near a stream or river, it is usually flourishing with health, radiating wellness, tall and strong, deeply rooted in the ground. That is what we all need, personally. It’s what the church needs; people with roots sunk deeply into Christ, bearing fruit in season, alive and delighted with life, energized and sustained by the living God.

God desires that we should grow. He has given us a wonderful resource in the Scriptures; written by people of deep faith who shared their experience God. This is a remarkable resource for us to study and meditate on. God desires to speak to us through words and images, stories, parables and poems and history. Our task—our privilege—is to strive to listen to God voice, to discern God will, to learn more about God’s nature as we open ourselves and surrender ourselves to him.



TO and FRO with the Editor

Question:

Unlike some of the other world religions Christianity seems to be unique in its claim to be ‘the truth’ or to teach the ‘one true way’ to God. Isn’t this intolerant and arrogant? R.A

Answer:

We certainly live in a period when truth is a value relating to and decided by a particular person at a particular time and place. What is true for one may not be true for another. Hindus have long held that God is one, but the ways to approach him are many. God welcomes humans along many paths. Therefore, that religious tradition in which a person is born is best, for that person. Many Westerners, weary of the dogmatics of much in the Christian tradition, have found this idea appealing because of its apparent tolerance.

Tolerance is certainly a virtue to be prized when it means respect for another person’s faith or conviction. But is it truly responsible to regard all ideas as being of equal value? The fact is, neither Christianity nor any other proposal can be true if it does not to some degree exclude what contradicts it. In some parts of the world today, there are still tribes who saw holes in the skulls of living people who are suffering from persistent headache. This is done in the belief that opening the cranial shell will enable the evil spirit to escape. It is difficult to argue that such a belief bears equally on human well-being as other beliefs, which takes into account diseases like migraine, or meningitis.

Truth always has intrinsic offensiveness—whether religious or scientific truth. It is singular, and in that sense, intolerant. If Barak Obama is President, then it is untrue to say that Hilary Clinton holds that office.

The exclusive nature of truth is everywhere apparent. For this reason, it is curious that so many want to say that a religion is true to the extent that it embraces all systems and rejects none. This is untenable. No one can, at one and the same time, embrace and live by ideas that each requires the cancellation of the other. An endlessly open mind is a mind that is closed to truth.

As a religion, Christianity is no better and no worse than any other belief system. Its significance lies not in any claim that it is true or that it ‘has’ the truth. Rather, in the claim truth really does exist; that *we* have not searched and found the truth, but truth has searched and found us, and we are thereby uplifted and refined, and life works better because of it.

Question:

Bible passages like 1 Peter 3:1 and 1 Corinthians 11:3 seem pretty clear against things like the ordination of women. Why then all the argument? V.H.

Answer:

There’s no doubt that such verses offer what seems to be Scriptural authority for non-ordination of women. For many believers, if the Bible says women should be subject to men then that is that, and there the discussion should end. But there is more that ought to be said, first. The Bible writers wrote thus, and did so because they were reflecting the culture of their day and the place assigned to women in that culture. Not to take this into account means that other Scriptures that seem to take emperors, slaves and polygamy for granted, can also be used to validate such practices for all time. It is not enough to take a verse, or verses, from the Bible and use them to make certain human behaviors forever sacrosanct. The morality of the Bible is a work in progress; it indicates a direction; it has a trajectory. It is up to us to strive to discern where it is pointing, and how to be faithful to its intent.


Question:

In Acts 1:8, just prior to his ascension, Jesus promised power to his disciples for purposes of being his witnesses. What do you understand by power in this verse? C.N.

Answer:

Jesus is speaking of the Holy Spirit which he elsewhere calls “the promise of the father.” In the following chapter of Acts, Peter’s explanation of Pentecost shows that the Spirit operates in human life to enhance and enable them beyond their normal levels.

Any exercise of divine power in the human sphere is always linked to God’s purposes and not man’s. Remember Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:7, “*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*”

In human life, the default understanding of power is that it is a tool to aid in jostling for personal advancement; more power over other people. This is power for the purpose of domination and oppression. When God reveals his power, it is usually never recognized as such. Rather, it is perceived as weakness. Spiritual power is manifest the same way in men and women. Empowered by God, they seek not to assert themselves against others, or control them, but to be useful to them and serve them. Consider these words of Jesus: “*You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all*” (Mark 10:42-44). 

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