



GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

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FREE!

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“The Elephant in the Room”

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EDITORIAL . . .

“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:26, 27).

These words were addressed to the church at Corinth, but they carry a meaning that holds true for all the peoples of the earth. It is simply a fact of life that human beings are interdependent. We cannot live without each other. If in our daily routine we used only those materials which we had procured by our own efforts, we would soon be dead. A builder may claim to have constructed his own dwelling, but who produced the materials he used? A farmer plants wheat and corn, but where does his tractor, header combine and other farm machinery come from?

When next you sit to eat breakfast, take time to think where everything on the table comes from. Likely, you will learn that many nations of the world are present as you eat your first meal of the day. When you dress yourself tomorrow, reflect on the fact that the toil of poorly-paid workers in Asia may have provided you with your shirt. The rubber on your shoe soles may represent the sweated effort of jungle laborers. The wool in your warm coat may have originated on some vast sheep ranch in outback Australia. An Italian could have been your tailor, and your trousers might well have taken shape in a narrow lane in Fiji while your underwear emanated from China.

To live, we must share; there is no way around it. This was ever true, but now the world is shrinking, and the fact confronts us more forcefully than ever. Our dependence on fossil fuels means that our economy cannot function without the exertions of oil workers in foreign lands. The arrival of the World Wide Web and related technologies has bound us together as never before, in a community of mutual need and reliance.


In ages past, perhaps, people were able to live in the illusion that they needed no one else; they prospered in the falsehood of self-sufficiency. Now, when travel and communication are so

streamlined, we see up close those other human faces with whom we share the planet. Chinese, Russians, Refugees, Muslims, starving hordes in Africa—these are no longer remote. They stare at us through pained and pleading eyes from our living room TV.

Though we are much better informed now, we still manage to run the world badly. A third of the world's population is underfed. In the time it takes to read this, a thousand—most of them children—will have starved to death. This will have happened while richer nations waste much of their plenty. Each year tons of primary product is dumped in order to ‘manage’ market prices. The rationale for this obscenity may make sense to some, but there is bound to be hell to pay for it. A world where brotherly love is not the overriding consideration driving civil policy will surely lead to a chaos of hatred, fury and death.

Men and women refusing to acknowledge the other's want, as if it were their own, will sooner or later be plagued by the sufferings they chose to ignore. This is happening now. Diseases of the third world are slowly but surely making their way toward more privileged societies. If we do not share our food and medicine with them, they will certainly share their viruses with us.

The gospel affirms that God has made of one blood all nations of the earth. Jesus taught us to call God, father. If God is father, then humanity is one family; and the welfare of the family is predicated on the welfare of every last member thereof.

Christ intends that his church model to the rest of world, a society where each takes responsibility for each other. “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples; that you love one another” (John 13:35). How far we are from this ideal is plain for all to see, yet we do not give up; for we see in the way God loves, *our* only hope—and the hope of *others*. 



Pastor Ron Allen

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The Elephant in the Room

By Ron Allen

Earlier in my life, I worked on an orchard property where it was necessary to draw water from the river with which to irrigate citrus trees. Irrigation systems are known to occasionally develop leaks. If the leak occurs on the high side of the pump, then there is loss of pressure and water wastage happens. When there is a leak on the lower side, air is sucked into the pump and its ability to draw water is neutralized. Air is whizzed around by the impeller and the pump overheats and has to be shut down.

The leak must be located and sealed. Then, to get the pump working, all air has to be expelled from the pump through the introduction of water. This is called ‘priming’ the pump. When water is in the pump, air is excluded and the system obeys its purpose—the delivery of life-giving water.

In the first chapters of his Roman letter, Paul, the Christian missionary, has put forward a tightly-packed statement of the good news of Jesus—as he understands it. The gospel, he says, reveals the righteousness of God. Righteousness standing over against “*all the godlessness and wickedness*” of brazen evildoers, and against persons who believe themselves righteous because of their basic decency, civility and social accountability.

Coming into Romans 3:25, 26, Paul reaches new heights of ardor in outlining God’s achievement at Calvary; an achievement which laid down and made known, as never before or since, the righteousness of God, gifted to faith in Jesus. For Paul, the divine action on the cross is so sweeping, it bulks so large that there is no room in the universe for anything else.

There is a picturesque expression in common use these days. It is employed when reference is wont to be made to something that everyone knows is there, but which no one will mention by name. It is called: “The Elephant in the room.” It is not the expression Paul uses here, but his language has a similar function.



“Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith” (Romans 3:27 NIV). Other versions have: “Where is

boasting? It was shut out. Through **what law** was it shut out? The law of works? No, but through the law of faith.”

In this verse, Paul gives the word ‘law’ a meaning different to his usual one for it in Romans. Mostly, ‘law’ is the content of the Jewish religion, the Law of Moses (Paul reverts to that meaning in verse 28 where he says ‘a man is justified by faith apart from observing the **law**.’) When he asks, “by what law is boasting shut out?” it is not law as understood in Jewish devotion. It has a broader meaning acknowledged by ‘principle’ in the NIV translation, and that goes some way toward the sense. But Paul is unlikely to have been thinking of our concept of principle. His meaning is more likely to be something like this: *‘What manner of devotion; what model of devout practice; what way of being religious shuts out boasting?’*



The revelation of righteousness which God has brought, begs the question: ‘where is boasting?’ The majesty and scope of God’s gift is so large the suggested answer is: ‘Boasting is excluded.’ The same mighty work of God suggests an expansion of that answer. Namely: Boasting is shut out by a model of devout practice called faith.

The word ‘boasting’ occurs also in Romans 2:17. There Paul confronts his own people who believe that the judgment of God which looms over the Gentiles will not touch them. They are exempt because they possess and obey the Law of Moses. “*You rely on the law and brag (boast) about your relationship to God.*”

Boasting then, is a species of sanctimony in which a person presumes to position himself within God’s favor by means of his own good behavior. For the Jew, moral effort takes shape by means of conformity to the Law of Moses. Boasting is not limited to Jews any more than God’s law is for Jews only (Paul has already pointed out (2:14-16) that the pagan world is dimly aware of the claim of God’s law in its own conscience). Heathens are arrogant and boastful too. Boasting is the language of human nature. It is the deportment of a particular mode of religious endeavor. Let us say, that for all intents and

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purposes, that which is variously called the principle of observing the law, or the law of works, or a religious system based on moral effort—is boasting.

Boasting is the religious venture, centered on the consecrated toil of the subject. It is godliness pursued on the premise that dedicated labor does and will, result in an achievement known as righteousness, or ‘rightness with God.’ Boasting is therefore self-regarding. It is a perspective in which self-monitoring or self-assessment, takes up all the room. A Pharisee goes to the temple to pray. There he tells God about all the good things he has been doing. Boasting is not theo-centric; it is egocentric. It necessarily involves favorable comparisons of the self with others. The Pharisee thanks God he is not like other men.

Boasting is a religious standpoint, which, ostensibly, is rigorous. It requires effort and diligence, but it does *not* make for moral progress. Its disciplines are limited to matters which leave out things that *really* count; like justice and the love of God.

Fonzi, of Happy Days fame, was flash, brash, and cool. He wore his ample hair well-greased and slicked back. A signature move of his was to draw his comb from his pocket and approach the mirror in the men’s bathroom. Just before applying the comb to his hair he would pause and make a gesture of helplessness. Clearly, nothing could be done to improve his appearance; he was already perfect.

Boasting may be the most popular and plentiful way of being religious but ultimately, it is ruinous for society. There was a time before he met Jesus, when boasting was Paul’s brand of religious practice. With much enthusiasm, he organized his life according to the stipulations of the law. So pronounced was his zeal that he defended the law by persecuting those who failed to observe it as he felt they ought. As a ‘boaster,’ Paul became a terror to his fellow man.

Boasting as a way of doing religion can only be shut out by the introduction of another spiritual model called faith. Faith shuts out boasting because God is its absorbing interest. Who God is, what God is like, what God does and what he gives; these are faith’s themes. Boasting supposes that God can be presented with things he can’t say no to. For example: a reputable citizenship, philanthropic deeds, being a good churchman, supporting charities, knowing things the bible says, not taking drugs or going drunk in public and refraining from rape or murder. Faith receives and grasps what God has to offer. Specifically (in Romans) what God provides is righteousness, the gift of being ‘right with him.’ Faith grasps what cannot be improved upon and thereby deems all customary ways of obtaining rightness with God, useless. Faith ends any haggling, dickering or bartering with God. It drives out boasting as water drives air from a pump.

Paul views gospel faith in terms of what it is not. Faith is not boasting. If anything it is ‘un-boasting.’ Faith comes not into vogue after a person has managed to cease boasting. Rather, faith *is* boasting’s expulsion. Where faith is, boasting is not.

Martin Luther understood that in his discussion of faith in



Romans, Paul literally means: ‘faith alone.’ It is another way of saying, Christ alone, and it complies with 3:21 in which comes “... righteousness from God, apart from law.”


The circumstance in which a person is right with God is wrought by God through his Son Jesus. It comes into existence aside from dedicated human striving—apart from *that*. Apart from law, or apart from boasting.

Righteousness is by faith in God’s work, not mine, my rightness with God is absolute, now. It does not await a future event. Boasting hopes that, through perseverance in being good, in being politically correct, in checking all the boxes of community expectation, I will be approved at last; at the last judgment, or at death, or at some other occasion yet to come when God weighs everything and everyone.

Faith lives and thrives in confidence that the only righteousness capable of satisfying God—his own innate rightness—is in its possession at the beginning of its pilgrimage. Faith endures joyously, thankfully, knowing that journey’s end will only confirm what has been true all along the road. Faith knows that God will remain committed to those who, regretting their shortcomings, remain trustfully reliant on Jesus.

A method of controlling fires at oil well-heads involves creating an explosion even more forceful than the blowout that caused the fire. Well-head fires are fierce and intimidating. When the controlled explosion happens, the shock wave is so great it uses up all the oxygen and snuffs out the flame. For a brief time at least, the fire is inadmissible.

Once in the history of the world, God made known his righteousness by presenting his Son as a sacrifice of atonement. So prodigious was this righteousness, so terrible in its brilliance, its moment, validity and rightness, it used up all the oxygen of moralism and legalism. It put out the red-hot fire of religious pride. Where is boasting? It has had the breath sucked from it by the explosive outbreak of God’s righteousness.

There is a way of being religious which lets God be God. Let not mankind resist it. Let God be gracious, and us grateful. Let the gift of righteousness drive out judgment and petty comparisons. Let the adoration of God shut out self-worship. Let peace with God choke off boasting. Let joy eclipse drudgery and hope, despair. Let fellowship drive off competition. Let bondage end, freedom ring—and may perfect love cast out fear. 

Boasting Right and Boasting Wrong

Henri Nouwen

About the word 'glory,' I have gradually become aware of how central this word is in John's Gospel. There is God's glory, the right glory that leads to life, and there is human glory, the vain glory that leads to death. All through his Gospel, John shows how we are tempted to prefer vain glory over the glory that comes from God.



This idea did not affect me greatly till I realized that human glory is always connected with some form of competition. Human glory is the result of being considered better, faster, more beautiful, more powerful, or more successful than others. Glory conferred by people is glory that results from being favorably compared to other people. The better our scores on the scoreboard of life, the more glory we receive. This glory comes with **upward mobility**. The higher we climb on the ladder of success, the more glory we collect. This same glory also creates our darkness. Human glory, based on competition, leads to rivalry; rivalry carries within it the beginning of violence; and violence is the way to death. Thus, human glory proves to be vain glory, false glory, and mortal glory.

How then do we come to see and receive God's glory? In his

Gospel, John shows that God chose to reveal his glory to us in his humiliation. That is the good, but also disturbing news. God, in his infinite wisdom, chose to reveal his divinity to us not through competition, but through compassion, that is, through suffering with us. God chose the way of **downward mobility**. Every time Jesus speaks about being glorified and giving glory, he always refers to his humiliation and death. It is through the way of the cross that Jesus gives glory to God, receives glory from God, and makes God's glory known to us. The glory of the resurrection can never be separated from the glory of the cross. The risen Lord always shows us his wounds.

Thus, the glory of God stands in contrast to the glory of people. People seek glory by moving upward. God reveals his glory by moving downward. If we truly want to see the glory of God, we must move downward with Jesus. This is the deepest reason for living in solidarity with poor, oppressed, and handicapped people. They are the ones through whom God's glory can manifest itself to us.

-Henri J. M. Nouwen: THE ROAD TO DAYBREAK.
pp. 97, 98.



Powerful Humility

By Gordon Powell

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). We despise meekness, that fawning, snivelling, yes-man attitude, which we associate with such unpleasant characters as Uriah Heep, the despicable hypocrite in *David Copperfield*. We picture such people bowing and scraping and we feel the urge to give them a good kick. Surely, Jesus did not mean that our happiness as Christians depended on becoming like that!

Certainly not! Jesus himself was never like that although he said, “I am meek and lowly in heart.” He was meek, but there was a power about his meekness that frightened some people, especially those who were morally weak or positively evil. No, when Jesus talked about meekness he was talking about something that requires strength; strength of mind, self-control.

The French translated our test, “Blessed are the debonair”—meaning, “Blessed are the poised, the polite, the well-mannered, and the gentlemanly. The aggressive type may appear to forge ahead for a time, but in the long-run, the gentle people are those who make a real success of life. The world measures success in terms of money and power over others. Jesus measured success in terms of happiness, inner peace and joy, and the capacity not to dominate others but to serve them and make them happy.

Will Rogers remarked once that he ‘never met a man he did not like.’ If he had been proud, arrogant, conscious of his success, he would have despised others and they would have resented it, but because he was humble he looked up to others. They liked it and loved him for it.

You can get on better with yourself if you are humble. What are the main sources of unhappiness? There are many, I know,

but would you not agree that many people are unhappy today not because they haven’t enough to get by, but because the Joneses have more than they have. Supposing they could get rid of that pride and develop Christian humility so that they no longer worry what the Joneses have, and in fact rejoice for the Joneses because of their greater possessions, then this situation would produce not unhappiness, but happiness for them.

Others are unhappy because people criticize them or pass them by. Their pride is hurt. Christian humility in itself eliminates a considerable amount of criticism. If criticism still comes, the Christian humility accepts it and does something about it. Where pride has been brought under control people are probably not even aware that they are being passed by, or if they are, they could not care less. The unhappy people are those who claim some position and are terrified of losing it.


Phillips translates our text: “Happy are those who claim nothing, for the whole earth will belong to them.” There is profound truth in that paradox. Selfishly claim position, or privilege or possession and you are terrified all the time of losing them. Develop humility and indifference to these things and you find you can enjoy the universe without any fear of being deprived of it.

The first beatitude says “blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” What does it mean to be poor in spirit? It means the opposite to being high and mighty, proud, aggressive, over-bearing, self-assertive. A man who adopts such an attitude to God cannot receive any blessing from God because he has not started to comprehend what Almighty God is like. The man who finds God, and thereby realizes that by comparison he is nothing and has nothing, is poor in spirit.

Jesus is always the supreme example of his own teaching. He was meek, considerate, gentle, yet he is slowly but surely inheriting the earth. As Napoleon Bonaparte put it in his famous statement:

“Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I reared great empires, but upon what do these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire upon love and to this very day, millions would die for him.” Yes, blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

—Gordon Powell.

HAPPINESS IS A HABIT,
pp. 31-38. 

WHEN PRIDE COMES,
THEN COMES DISGRACE,
BUT WITH HUMILITY COMES WISDOM.

PROVERBS 11:2

Blessed Are . . . The Poor?

By Louis Evelyn

What is poverty? We all know it is not an economic state. It is not a question of money but a question of heart. The fact of not having money is not a virtue. One can be penniless and have the soul of a rich man. One can also (but it is rare) be a man of property and have the soul of a poor man. **Poverty is a frame of mind and we are all invited to it. It is a certain experience of our human limits that makes us open ourselves to God and lose our ambition to be self-sufficient. It turns us toward him in expectation and trust.** Every man is a poor man without knowing it, and economic poverty is blessed because it is the sacrament, the sensible sign of a much profounder poverty,—this one universal, the poverty of the soul, the misery of our love and faith.

Poverty and suffering do not always make us better, they do not always bring us closer to virtue, but they always bring us closer to truth. They tell us about ourselves. Man is poor at the bottom of himself, and if he ceased being poor economically, he would still be terribly poor morally. Material poverty is only a sign, a warning, and a symbol of our real poverty. Each of us should think of how he has experienced the world, the limitation of man, the indigence and profound weakness of the human soul.

The burden *we* bear reveals to each of us what *others* bear. Our misery is fraternal in the sense that it tells us about the men about us. It is naïve to think that there are people outside of this fraternity, people without need of anyone else. At some level of human experience, each man knows that he is poor. At some level of human experience, we are all totally insufficient before God.

The more you have faith in God, the more you have the feeling of your smallness. No one has ever known God without himself to be poor and a sinner. There is no greater strength than to dare to be weak in this way. The man who knows he is weak before God is strong in God. The man who knows himself to be poor before God is rich in God—not in himself, but in God. He can welcome everything. He is in harmony with all that is real. The only true man is the poor man.

We have understood nothing about poverty if we have not understood that its source is in God. God is poor. Poverty is a theological virtue. The beatitudes

are the confidential revelation of the ways of God. Hear all of the beatitudes in this way. Jesus confided to us the secret of the way in which he truly lives. He is poor. He places all his satisfaction in another; he has nothing he does not want to give to the father. The Son has nothing by himself. He does nothing on his own, but only what he sees the father do.

The poor man knows how to receive. To give is often the act of a rich man: one gives from above to below. But to receive is the act of a poor man. What Christ reproaches money for is that it divides men. The man who is attached to money shatters the work of God—human community.

Woe to the rich man: he cuts himself off from God and places his confidence elsewhere. And he cuts himself off from his brothers because he ignores them, exploits them, and sets them aside, because he prefers his gold to their company. Poverty makes us fraternal; but the rich man is a solitary person. He must isolate himself in order to defend his riches.

Happy the poor man, for he is dispensed from being rich. He lives in joint possession with providence. He accepts a certain necessary insecurity because he has a father in heaven and brothers on earth. Happy the poor man, for he is filial, free, fraternal. He has entered the kingdom of God. He has begun to enjoy a life and a happiness which belong to him forever.

-Louis Evelyn. A RELIGION FOR OUR TIME, pp. 12-27. 




Shared Weakness: (A Communion of Strugglers)



the redeeming knowledge that other people—nice, honorable, attractive people—were struggling with the same demons you were.

The heroes of the Bible are not perfect people. Their great deeds of faith overshadow their mistakes, but they all make their share of mistakes because they are human, not mythical models of perfection.

It ought to be with a sense of relief, not a sense of compromise and reluctance, that we come to the conclusion that we are not, and never will be, perfect. We are not settling for mediocrity. We are understanding our humanity, realizing that as human beings, the situations we face are so complex that no one could possibly be expected to get them right all the time.

-Harold S. Kushner: HOW GOOD DO WE HAVE TO BE? pp. 52-54. 

An outlook on life, which provides for personal improvement and spiritual strengthening, needs to be of a kind that is opposite to a religious perspective referred to as 'boasting' by the apostle Paul (Romans 3:27). Harold Kushner, renowned Rabbi and author, has the following pertinent wisdom:

A woman told me of going to a support group for compulsive overeaters and confessing to fishing food out of the garbage can after her family had gone to bed. Instead of telling her, "That's sick; you've got a real problem," as her friends did, the other group members responded, "Yes Jean, we've done that too and we know how terrible we feel when we do that. It will always be a struggle, but you can learn to control yourself."

The group offered not shared strength but shared weakness, the "shared honesty of mutual vulnerability openly acknowledged,"



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Why Are We Saved By Faith?

By Charles H. Spurgeon

Why is faith selected as the channel of salvation? No doubt this inquiry is often made. “*By grace are ye saved through faith*” (Ephesians 2:8) is assuredly the doctrine of Holy Scripture and the ordinance of God, but why is it so? Why is faith selected rather than hope or patience? It becomes us to be modest when answering such a question. God’s ways are not always to be understood; nor are we allowed to presumptuously question them. Humbly we would reply that, as far as we can tell, faith has been selected as the channel of grace because faith is naturally adapted to be used as the receiver. Suppose that I am about to give a poor man some money. I put it into his hand. Why? Well, it would be hardly fitting to put it into his ear or lay it on his foot. The hand seems made on purpose to receive. So, in our mental frame, faith is created on purpose to be a receiver. It is the hand of the man, and there is fitness in receiving grace by its means.

Do let me put this very plainly. Faith that receives Christ is as simple an act as when your child receives an apple from you because you hold it out and promise to give him the apple if he

comes for it. The belief and the receiving relate only to an apple, but they make up precisely the same act as the faith that deals with eternal salvation. What the child’s hand is to the apple, that your faith is to the perfect salvation of Christ. The child’s hand does not make the apple nor improve the apple nor deserve the apple; it only takes. Faith is chosen by God to be the receiver of salvation because it does not pretend to create salvation nor to help in it, but it is content to receive it humbly. ‘Faith is the tongue that begs pardon, the hand that receives it, and the eye that sees it; but it is not the price that buys it.’

Faith never makes herself her own plea. She rests all her argument on the blood of Christ. She becomes the good servant to bring the riches of the Lord Jesus to the soul because she acknowledges from where she drew them and admits that grace alone trusted her with them.

Faith is again selected because it gives all the glory to God. It is of faith that it might be by grace, and it is of grace that there might be no boasting, for God cannot endure pride. “*The proud he knoweth afar off*” (Psalm 138:6). Now, faith

excludes all boasting. The hand which receives charity does not say, “I am to be thanked for accepting the gift.” That would be absurd. It is a very simple thing that the hand does—though very necessary—and it never designates glory to itself for what it does. So God has selected faith to receive the unspeakable gift of his grace. It cannot take any credit to itself but must adore the gracious God who is the giver of all good. Faith sets the crown on the right head. Therefore, the Lord Jesus was accustomed to putting the crown on the head of faith, saying, “*Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace*” (Luke 7:50).

Faith saves us because it makes us cling to God and therefore connects us with him. I have often used the following illustration. Years ago a boat was upset above Niagara Falls. Two men were being carried down the current when persons on the shore managed to float a rope out to them. Both seized it. One of them held on to it and was safely drawn to the bank. But the other, seeing a great log come floating by, unwisely let go of the rope and clung to the log for it was bigger and apparently better to cling to. The log with the man on it went right over the vast abyss because nothing connected the log and the shore. The size of the log was of no benefit to him who grasped it; it needed a connection with the shore to produce safety.

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So when a man trusts to his works or to sacraments or to anything of that sort, he will not be saved—there is no junction between him and Christ. But faith, though it might seem like a slender cord, is in the hand of the great God on the shore. Infinite power pulls in the connecting line between God and faith and thus draws the man from destruction.

Faith is chosen again because it touches the springs of action. Even in common things, faith of a certain sort lies at the root of all. I wonder if I am wrong if I say that we never do anything except through faith of some sort. A man eats because he believes in the necessity of food. He goes to his business because he believes in the value of money. He accepts a check because he believes the bank will honor it. Columbus discovered America because he believed there was another continent beyond the ocean. The Pilgrim Fathers colonized it because they believed that God would be with them on those rocky shores. Most grand deeds have been born of faith. For good or for evil, faith works wonders for by the man in whom it dwells.

Faith in its natural form is an all-prevailing force which enters into all manner of human actions. Possibly he who mocks faith in God is the man who in evil form has the most faith. Indeed, he usually falls into a credulity which would be ridiculous if it were not disgraceful. God gives salvation to faith because by creating faith in us he touches the real mainspring of our emotions and actions. He has, so to speak, taken possession of the battery, and now he can send the sacred current to every part of our nature. 'What oil is to the wheels, what weights are to a clock, what wings are to a bird, what sails are to a ship, that faith is to all holy duties and services.' Faith again has the power of working by love. It influences the affections toward God and draws the heart after the best things. He who believes in God will beyond all question love God.

Faith is an act of understanding but it also proceeds from the heart. God gives salvation to faith because it resides next door to the affections and is closely related to love. And love is the parent and nurse of every holy feeling and act. Love to God is obedience; love to God is holiness. To love God and to love man is to be conformed to the image of Christ and this is salvation.

Moreover, faith creates peace and joy. He who has it, rests, is tranquil, glad, and joyous, and this is a preparation for heaven. God gives all heavenly gifts to faith for this reason among others—that faith works in us the life and spirit which are to be eternally manifested in the upper and better world. Faith furnishes us with armor for this life, and education for the life to come. It enables a man both to live and die without fear; it prepares both for action and for suffering. Hence, the Lord selects it as a most convenient medium for conveying grace to us and securing us for glory.

Certainly faith does for us what nothing else can do. It gives us joy and peace and causes us to enter into rest. Why do men attempt to gain salvation by other means? An old preacher says, "A silly servant, who is told to open a door, puts his shoulder against it and pushes with all his might. But the door

does not stir, and he cannot enter, whatever strength he uses. Another comes with a key, easily unlocks the door, and enters immediately. Those who would be saved by works are pushing at heaven's gate without a result, but faith is the key which opens the gate at once." Will you not use that key? The Lord commanded you to believe in his dear Son. Therefore, you may do so, and in doing so you will live. Is this not the promise of the gospel, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mark 16:16). What can your objection be to a way of salvation which commends itself to the mercy and the wisdom of our gracious God?

-C. H. Spurgeon. ALL OF GRACE, pp. 62-67. 

*I have no voice for singing,
I cannot make a speech,
I have no gift for music,
I know I cannot teach.
I am no good at leading,
I cannot organize,
And anything I write,
Would never win a prize.*

*It seems my only talent,
Is neither big nor rare,
Just to listen and encourage
And to fill a vacant chair.
But all the gifted people
Could not so brightly shine
Were it not for those who use
A talent such as mine.*

-Unknown

Pascal's Wager: Christ and the Wager

By Desmond Ford

*And sitting down, they watched him there.
The soldiers did;
There, while they played with dice,
He made his sacrifice,
And died upon the cross to rid
God's world of sin.
He was a gambler too, my Christ
He took his life and threw
It for a world redeemed
And ere his agony was done.
Before the westering sun went down,
Crowning that day with its crimson crown,
He knew that he had won.*
- Studdert Kennedy

When considering the claim of Scripture to be a divine revelation, primary attention should be given to its central figure—Christ. Do not get bogged down in issues relating to the historicity of Old Testament passages, the factuality of the Bible's miracles, apparent contradictions, or the ambiguous behavior of Bible characters. There is a shortcut for solving the riddle of life, and if we take it, most of our personal and research dilemmas find their solution as well. The most direct route through the labyrinth of religious and philosophical controversy is to answer properly the question, "What was the real nature of the man who appeared 2000 years ago in Palestine claiming to be a ransom for the sins of the world?" We believe in the sun, not because we see it, but because through it we see everything else. That's the way it is with Christ. Malcolm Muggeridge wrote:

"All creation, even our sins, everything that happens, all doing and considering, a leaf falling, a nuclear bomb exploding, the total experience of living, individually and collectively, carries God's messages as it were encoded. But we see the key to decipher them, to be able to encode them and, of course, the key that came to us is the incarnation." *-The End of Christendom, p. 10.*

Oswald Chambers offers to us all a most significant warning. Here it is:

"Everything a man takes to be the key to a problem is apt to turn out another lock. For instance, the theory of evolution was supposed to be the key to the problem of the universe, but instead it has turned out to be a lock. Again, the atomic theory was thought to be the key; then it was discovered that the atom itself was composed of electrons, and each electron was found to be a universe of its own, and that theory too becomes a lock, not a key. Everything that man attempts as a simplification of life, other than a personal relationship to God, turns out to be a lock, and we should be alert to recognize when a thing turns from a key to a lock. God himself is the key to the riddle of the

universe, and the basis of things is to be found only in him." *-Baffled to Fight Better, p. 99.*

Christ claimed to be God incarnate. Only that claim makes sense of his other claims. Consider some of these: that he is the light of the world; that all authority in heaven and earth is given to him; that he has complete control over nature; that all the angels are his; that he is the Savior of mankind; that he can forgive sins; that he will be the final judge of all men; that he existed before Abraham, and enjoyed glory with God the father before the world was.

Yet, the Man who said these things described himself as meek and lowly in heart, and we are not amazed! No man spoke as he spoke, because no man lived as he lived, and because no one was in nature what he was. He was just as much God as though not at all man, and just as much man as though not at all God.

Christ believed these claims so implicitly that he was prepared to risk not only his own life, but the lives of his friends as they, too, advocated his gospel. He foretold that his followers would be persecuted and put to death, and yet he intimated, also, that a fate was a light thing in comparison with the importance of establishing his sovereignty over all of the world.

Christ's claims even survived the test of apparent failure. On the cross, even after being rejected by his own nation and religious leaders, he could still behave as king of eternity, promising heaven to a penitent criminal and interceding as calmly for his enemies as though he were walking the pavements of a country town on a sunny day.

Despite his insight into the nature of man and his understanding regarding truth and morality, he himself was never conscious of personal guilt. Could one flaw be found in the fourfold narrative, the whole picture would be blemished and Christ's claims dissipated? No such flaw exists, and if he was altogether good, he was altogether God, for good men do not lie regarding themselves, and no merely human person is without sin.

Millions in every century in finding Christ find meaning, hope, and love. They also come to see his reflection in the world about them—a reflection to which they had long been blind. One such discoverer wrote the following:

*"I see his blood upon the rose
And in the stars the glory of his eyes,
His body gleams amid eternal snows;
His tears fall from the skies;
I see his face in every flower,
The thunder and the singing of the birds are but his voice;
And carved by his power the rocks are his written words.
All pathways by his feet are worn.
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea;
His cross is every tree."*

-Desmond Ford: GOD'S ODDS, pp. 39-42. 

Word from the Well: The Taste of Living Water The Perimeter of Christianity

By David Woodyard

One of the central issues for a number of people in our time is whether or not they can in good conscience identify themselves as Christians. Their hesitancy is rather refreshing. Too many for too long have glibly assumed the label without any awareness of what it means or the demands it puts upon a person. While some are anxious to be counted in “just in case Christianity turns out to be true,” the majority are cautious because they do not want to presume upon a noble tradition in which they have participated fragmentarily. A young woman of substantial integrity, who was driven by a passionate desire to secure herself to a meaning for her life, framed the question thus: “Is it possible to be participating in the substance of faith without sharing its rituals or accepting its symbols?”

That defines the issue rather neatly and almost demands a negative response. Whether or not one is a theologian, one must accept the intrinsic relationship between form and content. Man is a symbolizing and ritualizing creature. Thus one is tempted to argue that the Christian meanings and the traditional ways in which they are expressed and celebrated belong to together. Yet every human contention, even those we declare most absolutely, has its qualifications. This affirmation of the integrity of form and content is relativised by that “freedom of God” which Karl Barth forever sets before our thinking.

The God of the biblical faith is certainly not limited to those forms through which we have traditionally acknowledged and remembered his presence. Perhaps we need now to learn the hard lesson of the Jews in the first century: God isn’t even totally committed to the chosen people, he can bypass them when it serves his purposes.

This freedom of God demands that we be prepared for him to invade our lives in ways and forms and through persons that he never has before.

The most important thing in the perimeter of Christianity is not the affirmations that are made but the questions that are raised. The mistake most of us make in assessing our relationship to Christianity is that we measure ourselves against its conclusions. We stand up against the claims that Christ is divine, that the Bible is inspired, and that God controls history and we become disillusioned by our inability to appropriate them.

Some years ago when George Buttrick was University Preacher at Harvard, he invited Archibald MacLeish to lead in worship. The poet refused, rather abruptly. Later in the afternoon, MacLeish phoned to apologize for his manner but also to explain that he could not accept the assignment in good conscience. Buttrick understood and thought no more of it. But that evening the phone rang in his home, and it was the poet again. “Hello George, this is Archie. I’ll do it, but one thing must be clear. I’m not convinced that Christianity has the answers we are looking for—but I do think it has the right

questions.” As far as I’m concerned, that’s all it takes to be on the perimeter of Christianity. The issue is not one’s ability to accept the answers but to identify with the questions.

What can I trust? Where can I invest myself and not be cheated? I submit that this is one of the most significant questions any of us asks. Like Captain Ahab in Melville’s *Moby Dick*, we need to “feel something in this slippery world that can hold.” We all stand in need of something to which we can give infinite attention, something that can elicit from us unconditional devotion, and something we can cling to with ultimate passion.

Yet we seldom ask the question of trust in its pure form. It comes wrapped up in intense experience. For many, it is the mood of disillusionment, when things we trusted gave out. Young persons may have invested themselves generously in a love relationship with the expectation that they might spend their lives together. Then what was between them gave out leaving one or both wondering if they could risk involvement again. Any of us can be unnerved by the ever-present absurdities of life. Our trust in life’s goodness can be destroyed when death upends its harmony; the betrayal of us by a person whose loyalty we never questioned can lead to cynicism about friendship; a freak twist of events and reverse a promising career and leave as its mark bitterness and resentment.

In yet another person, the question of trust may be present in the form of a denial that anything can be trusted. In him, the concern is expressed in a passionate rage against anything that presents itself as trustworthy. There’s at least a fragment of that in all of us, but implicit in the negation is usually a search for something to rely upon. For example, those who rail most vigorously against the Christian faith take it more seriously than many who embrace it. This must have been what led Luther to write that “nobody in this life is nearer to God than those who hate and deny him, and he has no more pleasing, no dearer children than these!”

It is affirmed in the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Paul’s contention is that Christ points him toward what can be trusted. This Jesus of Nazareth holds him up against something that is ultimately Real and really Ultimate. This figure of flesh and blood controls him with what “in this slippery world” a man can hold on to and not be deceived.

That is the claim faith sets upon us. But what does Paul mean when he says, “If anyone is in Christ?” It is to experience in the midst of all that is old, stale, and decadent its transformation into something new. This is why Paul Tillich calls Jesus “the New Being.” He stands for the possibility that every moment of life can be made over into what it ought to ➔



The Post-Modern Mind

By Melissa Flores

The term 'post-modern' was first coined in 1979 by sociologist Jean-Francois Lyotard, in his book *'The Post-modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge'*. Since, it has come to represent to some, the best of times; to others, the worst of times. Both views are certainly true depending on how you wish to view things. We are responsible as believers, to identify the purpose of our times and to play our redemptive role in that story. According to sociologists, there are three main philosophical eras:

Pre-modern Era

- 1500s and earlier.
- Absolute truth is revealed by God or a god.
- Authority is rooted in the church or religious systems.

Modern Era

- 1500s -1900s
- Truth is discovered by the five human senses (empirical evidence).
- Truth is also discovered by human logic or reason.
- Authority shifts to universities, academia, and political realms.

Post-modern Era

- Late 1900s - current.
- Truth is revealed by all prior mentioned methods as well as socially, relationally, and experientially.
- Less hierarchical authority structures are preferred, because authority sources are distrusted.

The modern era, though seemingly humanistic in description, was brought on by a religious revival. German inventor, Johannes Gutenberg, in 1439 A.D. invented the first printing press for the purpose of mass-producing Bibles. Theretofore, Bibles were rare, chained to pulpits, printed in Hebrew, Latin or Greek, and only available to educated clergy. Fast-forward to 1517 A, D, when Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenburg, Germany. Luther effectively waged war on the Catholic Church and

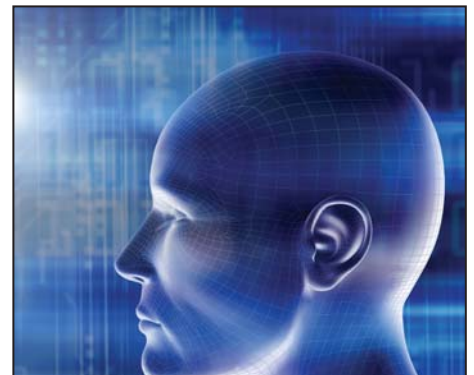
called into question 95 different doctrinal points of difference. He supposed that every man should have access to the Bible in his native language, and be the arbiter of his own faith.

If a man could have read his own Bible, he could quickly discern and abandon the faulty doctrines of the Church. Gutenberg's press was now improved and capable of meeting the demand of mass production.

With this revolution, great light flooded the earth fueling aspects of the Renaissance and subsequent Enlightenment. (NOTE: I am not suggesting that the Church should be abandoned, but merely reformed. Neither am I suggesting that the ideas and philosophies of the Renaissance and Enlightenment were fully congruent with biblical thought. There were, however, advancements in the disciplines that would never have come about without the light of God at work within human minds of that time).

It was Gutenberg, Luther, and their contemporaries who championed the individual as capable of discovering truth, outside of the religious organization of the day. Characteristic of the **Modern Era**, these men played their role in the redemptive story of their times. Likewise, there are godly people alive, operating in the characteristics of the **Post-modern Era**, who will play their role in the great reform that is under way.

- From Melissa Flores' blog: definingwords.com 



be. The Christian faith bids us trust that our life can be made new.

Many of us want to protest that we have not been involved in anything like that. At times, the 'old' has such a stranglehold upon our lives that the promise of something new is vacuous if not offensive. I cannot argue with that feeling; it's as real as life itself, but have there not been moments in which life's hostile facade has been accosted and overcome, when the old has been broken down and you have been in the presence of newness? It may have been a moment in which the meaninglessness of your life gave way under the pressure of a task you felt destined to fulfill. It may have been a moment in which the coldness and indifference of those about you were transformed into warmth and concern. It may have been a moment in which your anxiety about life was overcome by the courage to engage it without fear. It may have been a moment in which you recognized the humanness of one who had been the object of

hate or scorn, or it may have been a moment in which you looked into the eyes of another and responded to his need. You can chalk it all up to chance if you like. The Christian faith understands these moments as ones in which God is present making all things new.

Now let me return to the question with which I began: Is it possible to be participating in the substance of the Christian faith without sharing its rituals or accepting its symbols? The answer is yes. You are on the perimeter of Christianity if you can identify with its questions; you are moving in toward its center if you have experienced moments in which all things are made new. All I can do now is invite you to explore the possibility that you are "in Christ," and that the forms of faith may be the fullest way to celebrate that identity.

-David Woodyard: **LIVING WITHOUT GOD—FOR GOD.** pp. 53-59. 

TO and FRO with the Editor

Question:

How can I succeed as a Christian and do great things for God? L. T.

Answer:

Wherever you live, or whatever might be your occupation, look for people who are the very antithesis of greatness in the world. They are not usually to be found in places where 'successful' people are. They inhabit the shadows. They live on the margins where those of no importance always end up. As a society we do not wish to be confronted with people who have failed to make it in terms of 'normal' categories of success. Destitute, physically handicapped, mentally ill, homeless, the poor and weak of the world—they are the 'least of these,' the 'little ones' Jesus spoke about; whom he called his brethren. We are right to think of doing great things for God, but we will never realize the dream without joining Jesus in the things that mattered to him; without seeking out and serving the kinds of people he befriended.

Question:

What did Jesus mean by 'take up your cross' and follow me? E.

Answer:

It is common to hear folk speak of some chronic difficulty in their life as their 'cross' which they must bear. The exalted meaning implicit in Jesus' words is watered down when persons describe inconveniences like a bout of the flu or a car battery failure as their cross. The New Testament meaning of Christian cross-bearing is informed by what the cross was for Jesus. His cross began to take shape as the society he inhabited began to realize that he marched to a different drum-beat to theirs. His values were not their values. He came to do the will of his father. Ultimately, that obedience brought him into collision with the whole world; a crisis epitomized by his crucifixion.

For Christians, the cross is precisely the opposition, loss or suffering that is imposed on us as a direct result of our decision to live by the values of Christ's kingdom. As it was for him, our cross will be a result of our choosing.

Question:

Should Christians speak out on moral issues? G. H.

Answer:

Yes, but in a way that is informed by the grace of God. The church does not have a good record in this area. In a number of countries at the present time, the church is being called to account by secular authorities for its rank failure to protect children from abuse by its own clergy. More examples can be supplied in evidence of the fact that the church has demonstrated that it has its own moral problems. Gregory Boyd makes the following observation:


"Issues related to sex get massive amounts of attention while issues related to corporate greed, societal greed, homelessness, poverty, racism, the environment, racial injustice, genocide, war get little attention. We should speak with self-sacrificial actions more than with words. We should speak not as moral superiors, but as self-confessing moral inferiors. We should call attention to issues by entering into solidarity with those who suffer injustice. We should seek to free people from sin by serving them, not by trying to lord it over them. And we should trust that God will use our Calvary-like service to others to advance his kingdom in the world."

-Gregory Boyd: THE MYTH OF A CHRISTIAN NATION

Question:

Jesus said that he did not come to bring peace on earth, but as a sword. Is Jesus a war-monger? W. P.

Answer:

No. Jesus is the 'prince of peace.' Remember his daunting moral challenge? "Love your enemies." The beatitudes include this: "Blessed are the peacemakers." The message he entrusted to his disciples became known among them as "the gospel of peace" (Ephesians 6:15). When he warned that had not come to bring peace, Jesus was talking about the effect of his ministry, not the purpose of it. Before his death on the cross his words had proved disturbingly true. As the day of crisis approached, the community was increasingly polarized by him. "There was a division among the people because of him" (John 7:43). Jesus wanted to warn his followers that following him could be very costly. The apostle Paul later experienced the truth of Jesus' warning. He lost everything when he became a Christian—and he gained everything. 

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Did You Know?

The Middle East conflict might not be the best advertisement for religion, but what I cannot understand is the native presumption that once we got rid of religion the world would instantly be a better place.

So writes Dr. Michael Bird in reply to columnist Sam de Brito. He continues thus:

I can understand how the Iraqi crisis gives de Brito and others further grist for their mill that religion is the mother of all evils. It is clearly the case that religion, when understood in a certain way, can and does animate and legitimize the use of violence. It is worth pointing out that atheist regimes of the 20th century killed more people than all the jihads and intifadas of the same century combined. Millions upon millions of people perished in Hitler's holocaust, Stalin's Russia, Ceausescu's Romania, Mao's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia, and the Kim family dynasty of North Korea that continues its irreligious inspired brutality to this day.

These regimes frequently singled out and slaughtered religious communities, clergy and laity, of all ages. Churches, mosques, and synagogues were all demolished by the order of those whose minds were supposedly untainted with the puerile superstition of religion and were self-proclaimed rationalists. Atheist revisionists like Richard Dawkins habitually overlook or ignore the violence perpetuated by atheist regimes against religious communities.

Dawkins once claimed that no atheist would ever bulldoze a

cathedral, to which Oxford mathematician John Lennox responded that he was right, the cathedrals were too big: atheists used explosives! So, I find it ironic that de Brito wants to "judge an idea by the consequences to which it leads in action." If so, atheism is no longer the ideological messiah that he thinks it is.

I cannot speak for all religions. I belong to the Christian tradition, but one of the strengths of the Christian tradition is that we can take evil seriously. For Christians, evil is not simply a game with words, mythical language deployed to describe our own likes and dislikes. Instead, the Christian believes that evil is an intrusive force in the world, not how it was supposed to be and not how it will be. According to Christianity, God's plan is to expunge evil, not with holy violence or crusader carnage but, mysteriously, to draw it all into himself, into his Son's own crucifixion so that its power will ultimately be defeated.

The greatest violence in history has not been performed only by religious people. The most inhumane and horrific forms of violence are perpetuated by people of all faiths and none, who believe that their cause is so righteous that it justifies the most unjustifiable acts of evil.

The problem of evil is not simply a religious problem but a human one, and if the common denominator is humans themselves, then you can hardly chastise those of us who look to God for inspiration, courage, compassion and strength to resist evil.