

# Prepare<sup>the</sup>Way

*Preparing the Bride of Christ for the return of Christ*

Issue No. 109

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Expecting the return of Jesus  
**What difference  
does it make?**

**An amazing  
end-times  
prophecy**

Peter Pollock

**The power  
of the Cross**

**Retirement?  
It's not option!**

Special report

**500th anniversary  
of the reformation**

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## Contents

Issue No. 109

- 3 *Humility*
- 4 *Power of the cross*
- 6 *Shafts of Light* 36
- 8 *Amazing end-time prophecy*
- 10 *What difference does it make?*
- 11 *Forsaking all*
- 12 *Reformation Anniversary*
- 16 *Martin Luther*
- 18 *Bless God!*
- 20 *Theses for a new Reformation*
- 22 *Retirement?*
- 23 *Watch & Pray*
- 24 *Jesus, spring of life*

**COVER:** *Thus says the Lord, "Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk in it.' (Jeremiah 6:16)."*

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# Walk humbly to have God's full blessing

by W. C. Moore

**T**HE Pharisees are not all dead yet by any means. Even the most spiritual churches today have many Pharisees parading around – supposed to be “so good,” when as a matter of fact they have the devil in them and are as graves which appear not (Matthew 23:28).

Notice how humble David was when Nathan, God's messenger, pointed out to him his great sin – and see how quickly forgiveness followed David's confession: *“And David said to Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said to David, The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die (2 Samuel 12:13).”* David suffered terribly for his awful sin, but upon fully confessing and forsaking his sins, he was fully forgiven.

*“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).”*

Only upon full confession – and forsaking of sin – can God fully pardon.

*“He who covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy (Proverbs 28:13).”*

Even under the mighty ministry of John the Baptist, some would not repent. If we reject God's messenger we reject God Himself (Luke 7:29&30).

Did Job need to confess any sins? Well, not at first – he was not conscious of any. But God saw that Job would go much further in his experience of godliness, so He permitted Satan to attack him for his good. After all Job's sufferings and testings, God began to talk to him (Job 38).

In Job 40:3-5 we see his answer to the Lord:

*“Then Job answered the Lord and said: ‘Behold, I am vile; What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.’”*

Now this was not a real, humble, broken, full confession before the Holy Presence of Almighty God. It is as though Job had said, “Well, I will keep quiet. I think, Lord, You are pretty hard on me – as righteous a person as I am – but I won't say any more, I'll hush.”

We know that Job had not fully humbled himself before God, for the Lord said to him, “Will you indeed annul My judgement? Will you condemn Me, that you may be righteous (Job 40:8)?”

It is right that we should fully humble ourselves before God, the Creator of all things, Who gave His Son to die a cruel death for our poor souls. It is reasonable and proper that we should all make God FIRST in our lives.

How often God has trouble with us “old” saints! How often He finds it hard to get us into an humble, honest place before Him – where He can fully show us His favour.

Oh the terrible, subtle sin of self-righteousness! It was the religious leaders of Jesus' day who caused His crucifixion. It is hard for a person who has a reputation for sanctity and uprightness to humble himself fully and confess openly and fully when some sin is shown up in his life.

The tendency is to excuse ourselves, to justify ourselves, to blame other people, to blame conditions, to blame even God Himself – that WE may appear to be not so bad after all. Oh the deceitfulness of the human heart. May God help us!

*“And the Pharisees... heard all these things: and they derided Him. And He said to them, ‘You are they who justify yourselves before men; but God knows your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God (Luke 16:14&15).’”*

So even the ministry of Jesus, the Son of God, was rejected by those Pharisees. Are you rejecting His words – any of His words? Am I?

*“There is no respect of persons with God (Romans 2:11).”*

If a religious leader, like Saul of Tarsus for instance, will humble himself and throw away all his self-righteous rags (Isaiah 64:6) – God will have mercy on him.

Thank God, Job did finally come to a humble and a full confession.

*“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes (Job 42:5&6).”*

It was then that God began to bless him mightily. However, it was not till Job had prayed for those tormenting friends of his – prayed “for” them, not against them – it

was not till then that the Lord gave him a “double portion (Job 42:10).”

*“Love your enemies... pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you (Matthew 5:44).”*

One great lesson we learn from the experiences of Job is this – no matter how God has blessed us, no matter to what degree of holiness we have attained – God wants us to always be *humble* before Him.

If you have been saved 40 years – you need to humble yourself just as much as the drunkard or harlot who comes to the altar for salvation.

*“Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted (Matthew 23:12).”*

*“Every one who exalts himself shall be humbled; and he who humbles himself shall be exalted (Luke 18:14).”*

Are you a religious leader? Are you an “old saint?” Take care that you keep humble before God! Maybe you do not look so big in God's sight after all. Jesus told the religious leaders of His day,

*“Verily I say to you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you (Matthew 21:31).”*

It is an exceedingly dangerous thing to get into a place where you *want* the praises of men – or where you will *accept* the praises of people.

*“How can you believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that comes from God only (John 5:44)?”*


*“Woe to you when all men shall speak well of you! For so did their fathers to the false prophets (Luke 6:26).”*

Are you a Christian? Have you been invited to the wedding (Matthew 22:1-14)? Take heed then that you be not too much occupied with other things and neglect that humble, prayerful walk where your chief concern is, not what people think of you – but how you can *please God* (Matthew 22:14; 20:16).

When someone criticises you, or when some sermon “hits” you – don't “fight back” and try to defend yourself. Say rather, “Maybe that harsh criticism had some truth in it after all.”

*“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time (1 Peter 5:6).”*

*“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).”*

God resisted Job until Job gave up his pride and self-justification. It was when Job humbled himself and fully confessed that the Lord gave him His grace, His favour, His blessing, His help. 





# The power of the cross...

by **Peter Pollock**

*“God forbid that I should boast except in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world has been crucified to me and to the world (Galatians 6:14).”*

THAT scripture is no doubt well known to us. But have we come to truly understand the incredible significance of these words? Let us allow the magnifying-glass of God’s awesome spiritual truth identify all the challenging veracities that are contained in what Paul wrote...

Firstly, the apostle asks that God forbids – an extremely strong injunction – that he even dare or faintly consider it at all appropriate, to get carried away or engrossed with absolutely anything but the Cross! That we should even be tempted to get caught in our own humanity in any way is a contemplation that should never enter our minds.

This is a serious warning! He declares commitment, conviction and single-mindedness as a true fruit of the genuine “Cross” experience. And then he attributes to this understanding of the Cross, and what happened thereon with Jesus, the fact that he has now been totally delivered of any worldly values and ambitions. Strong stuff, indeed!

It reminds me of King Solomon in Ecclesiastes as he laments his way through “meaningless chasing after the wind” to come to the final conclusion that life is all about fearing God and keeping his commandments.

As you read on, I pray that God by His Spirit with profoundly remind us and indelibly write and etch on our hearts the eternal status of THE CROSS!

Jesus and the Cross are absolutely central to the Christian faith. May we never forget that or allow it to be reduced in its doctrinal stature. The original Easter was the greatest event in the history of mankind! It is key, core and crucial to a faith that is being attacked from all quarters.

Some of the attacks are subtle, some rather more blatant – but when we allow this key part of our faith and doctrine to be undermined in any way, we become very much the poorer, spiritually speaking.

John 3:16 tells us that God so loved, and that love saw Him give us His Son, Jesus. Interestingly enough, that verse contains 25 words in the King James translation and the central word is “SON!” Jesus in the middle with 12 words on each side. There were 12 tribes in the Old Testament and 12 apostles in the New Testament, not to mention that 24 elders bow before the Lamb in Revelation!

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## It is not God’s love that saved us...

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I am not promoting this as anything but an interesting observation. Naturally other translations and other languages would produce different figurations. Anyway, Jesus is the Saviour and that is the crux of the matter!

It is not God’s love that saved us, it is the person of Jesus Christ who paid the price and fulfilled that plan. We are saved by Jesus, not His attributes! We are not saved by concepts. And though God’s love, grace and mercy is all very powerfully tied up in the truth of the Gospel, it is Jesus who is the Redeemer, the Mediator and the Lamb of God. All authority is in Him and belongs to Him because God, the Father, has ordained it that way. It has been bestowed!

This is the way, the truth and the life. Every knee shall bow and tongue will confess that Jesus is the Lord. Nobody can come to the Father except through Jesus. Jesus came to reveal the Father. There were no other side issues!

“Jesus is unfortunately portrayed as a figurehead of a religion, a mere example. He is infinitely more than that! He is salvation itself; He is the Gospel of God,” writes Oswald Chambers.

The Cross is pivotal, an absolute central truth and this emphasis should never be challenged. The Cross and Holy Communion is the symbolic representation of the Christian faith, lest we ever forget! “Do this in remembrance of Me,” was the command passed down to us. And Jesus spoke about taking up your cross on a daily basis!

“I have been crucified with Christ,” says Galatians 2:20. “It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave

Himself for me.”

The very next verse continues: “I do not set aside the grace of God.” His grace, that unmerited favour, than enables us to stand before Him, is truly amazing! But we are united, first in His death and then in His resurrection. Romans 6:8: “If we died with Christ we also live with Him.” Galatians 5:24: “Those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

Again Oswald Chambers writes: “I have signed the death certificate of my sin nature! I take my emotional opinions and intellectual beliefs and turn them into a moral verdict against my sin nature. I give up my independent right to myself...”

Jesus did not say that we should make a determination to imitate Him but that we should be identified with Him in His death. Indeed, it is no longer I who live because I have been radically changed. It is not faith in faith but faith that transcends all imaginable limits – a faith that comes only from Jesus!

The Cross is mentioned 28 times in the Bible and it was spoken of prophetically by Jesus in John 12:31-33, “Now is the judgment of the world; now the ruler of the world will be cast out. And if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto Me” – speaking of course to signify by which death he would die.

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## **A dying to self**

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The Cross prophetically and symbolically indicates dying to self, a key element of the Christian faith, incorporating the need for acknowledgement and repentance of sin.

Paul spoke about the preaching of the Cross; the offence of the Cross; the Cross being emptied of its power by human wisdom and the triumph of the Cross! Oswald Chambers again writes: “The Cross of Christ is the revealed truth of God’s judgement on sin. It was the supreme triumph and it shook the very foundations of hell! There is nothing in time and eternity more absolutely certain and irrefutable than what Jesus accomplished on the Cross. The Cross was His purpose in coming. The incarnation of Christ would have no meaning without the Cross! The Cross is the central event in time and eternity and the answer to all the problems of both.

“The Cross is not the Cross of man, but the Cross of God and it can never be fully comprehended through human

experience. It is the gate through which any and every individual can enter into oneness with God. The heart of salvation is the Cross of Christ!”

Yes, God forbid that I should boast except is this Cross! Are we starting to catch the gist of this vital message? J.C. Ryle, many years ago, famously took Galatians 6:14 and concentrated a fantastic sermon on the profoundness of this statement, particularly coming from one so successful and accomplished as Paul.

He firstly apologises and then lists all the things that he would be justified to boast about in the human context. But in seeking to make a point, it is interesting to list what Paul did not glory in: In his national privileges; his own works; his knowledge; his grace; his churchmanship or his apostleship. Paul was an achiever of note and yet he rated all those things as nothing compared to the Cross!

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## **Beware religion in which there is not much cross**

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Paul understood the huge significance of the Cross, he loved to preach about the Cross, he loved to write about the Cross and he lived his life for it. We need to beware of religion in which there is not much Cross, and that was the warning Ryle put out there so many years ago. It was a problem then and nothing has changed!

Except that maybe it is more acute and more aligned to deceptive teaching in the mayhem of modern media madness. Why ought Christians glory in the Cross? Because God fore-ordained it! How is that for a start?

Furthermore, it was necessary for man’s salvation! It was endured voluntarily and it showed the extent of God’s love for sinful man. The Cross is the grand peculiarity of the Christian faith. The Cross is the strength of the mission. It is the secret of missionary success and it is the foundation of church prosperity.

Absolutely, it is the grand centre and core of true unity and union. When you talk about, and understand exactly what the Cross means, you are able to really and sincerely glory in the Cross of Christ!

It is in every way representative and symbolic of Jesus Christ and Him crucified and this genuinely indicates a “dying” believer, one who has recognised his sin and wretchedness, who has truly been “born again,” “born of the spirit,” “born anew,” “born from above” – who does take up his Cross on a daily basis and worships and

adores the person of Jesus Christ while at the same time marvelling at the attributes of God which enabled it all!

Sadly, according to A.W. Tozer, there is an “Old Cross” and a “New Cross.” “The ‘Old Cross’ changes lives, but there is a ‘New Cross,’ a modern corruption that permeates our humanistic new-age church movement. It is a new philosophy. This ‘New Cross’ is a friendly pal to sinful man! It does not slay the sinner any more, it simply redirects him gently. It gears him into a cleaner, jollier way of life. It saves his self-respect and self-esteem. And to the egotist it says come boast in the Lord...” concludes the well respected prophetic voice.

It’s lovely to hear testimonies but they do tend to grate when the concentration is on our own success and prosperity. Sadly, much of what we see these days in terms of “giving God the glory” is hardly glorifying to Jesus and His true Kingdom. Triumphalism, elitism and an overdose of humanism are nauseatingly paraded as spiritual success and achievement. It is a deception and a misrepresentation!

Jesus does not parallel the world, He intersects it. We are not public relations officers diluting the Gospel message. Making it seeker-friendly! We are not commissioned to make Christ more acceptable to big business, the media, the world of sports or modern education. We are not diplomats, we are prophets!


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## **Not compromise but an ultimatum**

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The message is not a compromise but an ultimatum. The Bible is not just an opinion or some good advice; it is the Word of God. I found deliverance from alcohol at the foot of the Cross. I experienced the most profound epiphany of my Christian walk in the Garden of Gethsemane in Jerusalem way back in 1986! And it all revolved around coming to grips with what truly happened on the Cross.

Yes, Jesus went through all of that for me. It was *my* sin and iniquity that put Him on that Cross. The Jews, the Romans and Pontius Pilate were all just the agents. And there, separated from His Father as He bore all our sin and iniquity He pleaded: “Forgive them, Father! They know not what they do.”

Understanding all that for the very first time truly changed my life. It is always so when we meet Jesus at the Cross! 





# Shafts of Light 36

by Helen Gardiner

*"Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; Save me, and I shall be saved, For You are my praise (Jeremiah 17:14)."*

**SOME while ago, God really challenged me with this verse of Scripture. What, He asked, did I base the certainty of my salvation upon? "Upon Your Word, Lord," I answered. So why, He asked, could I not also base my faith for healing – solely upon His Word?**

If I doubted His healing, how come I did not doubt His salvation? He said. "Don't you know that I am not a man that I should lie (Numbers 23:19)?"

The Lord began to give me Scripture upon Scripture about healing, showing He is passionate about healing. I have come to realise that so many of God's people are being robbed in this area...

I have heard people say, "Healing is the children's bread." But our lives do not often reflect that.

Recently, I listened to a teaching by a renowned preacher from the United States. He is powerful, especially as an evangelist, and he is also a humble and honest man. He confessed that he had recently been through a time of great fear and anxiety, as he went through a five-yearly colonoscopy. Because his father died at 75 of colon cancer, he is at risk, and so he has to undergo a colonoscopy every five years.

Yes, the devil has many of God's people in fear and trembling. And that is not what God desires.

As a foundation, God gave me two Scriptures that we need to embrace and build upon. If we can do this, the enemy's strongholds over our souls can be broken.

The first is Deuteronomy 32:39: *"Now see that I, even I, am He, And there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand."*

He is in charge. Not the devil. You will die when He has ordained. Whether you have the best medical care, or the worst.

The second paramount Scripture the Lord gave me is Philippians 1:21:

*"For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."*

Do we really believe that to die is gain? Many do not. Yet it should be so. The fear of death would be broken, if we had this illumination in our hearts.

What should we do when we are sick? Most go straight to the doctor, and perhaps get some prayer on the way.

I believe God uses doctors. But what concerns me is that we are most often unScriptural in our dealing with sickness.

The book of James gives us the New Testament pattern:

*"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed (James 5:14-16)."*

James says there is a connection between sickness and sin. Many people are offended by this. Yet, the fact that we are offended shows we are proud. Pride is a great sin. God resists the proud.

We love to quote the incident of the man born blind in John 9:2&3:

*"And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.'"*

So, yes, there are times when sickness is not caused by sin.

However, we need to consider also the case of the man who was lying down at the healing pool, and Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk (John 5:8)." Then verse 14 of the same passage goes on to say, "Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, 'See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.'"

So, I believe that when we are sick we should call for the elders. Be open to con-

fessing any sin that may be revealed. The doctor is the last resort, not the first. We have a doctor in our congregation who once said: "I just put in the sutures, God does the healing."

If we are going the medical route we need to be in much prayer.

We know a medical doctor who needed a hip replacement. This man has an intimate relationship with the Lord Jesus. However, he waited a long time before he felt the Lord was giving him the go-ahead to have the operation.

Medicine works, if it has God's blessing.

There are the obvious sins of the flesh, but there are the less obvious sins of the soul.

Jesus addresses a couple of these in Mark 11:22-26:

*"Jesus answered and said to them, 'Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be removed and be cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says. Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."*

*"And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."*

We see here that unbelief is a problem. It is the mountain referred to here. We also see that unforgiveness is a monster. If we are unforgiving, our prayers for healing for ourselves bounce off the ceiling. They do not ascend to the throne of God.

Pride is another sin of the heart that prevents healing. Proverbs 3:34 and James 4:6 tell us that "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Let's consider the following:

*"Bless the Lord, O my soul;  
And all that is within me, bless His holy name!  
Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
And forget not all His benefits;  
Who forgives all your iniquities,  
Who heals all your diseases (Psalm 103:1-3)."*  
*"Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him (Proverbs 30:5)."*

Every word includes *every word* about healing. He is a shield to us if we put our trust in Him. If we don't He is not a shield.

Deliverance is another aspect of healing.

Matthew 15:22-28 tells us the story of the woman from Canaan with the severely demon-possessed daughter. Jesus answers her in verse 24: "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

The passage goes on to record: "Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, 'Lord

help me!” But He answered and said, “It is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.”

And she said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters’ table.”

Then Jesus answered and said to her, “O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Notice, it says, the daughter was healed.

We live in a time when there are so many people suffering from psychiatric illnesses, which probably require deliverance. Yet, by and large, the church is powerless to help them. There is not the knowledge, the faith or the authority to help people with these things. A demon-possessed person can no more deliver themselves than can one who has heart disease heal him or herself. We need the miraculous!

How desperately we need to see healing and deliverance restored to the church in a significant way.

Maybe, if we are more Biblical in our ways, we may see more results.

At the end of Mark, in the commissioning passage of Jesus, He says, “They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover (Mark 16:18).”

The word “recover” seems to indicate a more gradual process of healing.

A comforting Scripture which God may give one who is very sick is John 11:4,

*“This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”*

*“But to you who fear My name the Son of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings (Malachi 2:4).”*

Sometimes we doubt whether God wants to heal us:

*“Now a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, ‘If you are willing, You can make me clean. Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, ‘I am willing; be cleansed (Mark 1:40&41).”*

I think it is important to recognise that Jesus was moved with compassion. Now I know that it is Jesus’ compassion that heals today – but I believe we often lack compassion for those in need of a miracle.

Proverbs 15:30 has some sound advice: *“The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and a good report makes the bones healthy.”*

When we are sick in our souls, often our bodies suffer:

*“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers (3 John 2).”*

Do we desire to live long? Peter has some

sound advice:

*“He who would love life and see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil (1 Peter 3:10-12, quoting from Psalm 34).”*

Jesus a number of times commends faith and says, “Your faith has made you well.” He says to the ruler of the synagogue whose daughter was dead:

*“Do not be afraid, only believe, and she will be made well (Luke 8:50).”*

So, does God want us never to be sick? David in Psalm 34:19 records.

*“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”*

The apostle Timothy had frequent infirmities, so much so that the apostle Paul advises him to “use a little wine.”

Another thing we need to consider is that God sometimes has a redemptive purpose in afflictions.

*“I know, O Lord, that Your judgements are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me (Psalm 119:75).”*

All of this means that when we are sick, we need to be on our knees, asking God what exactly is going on.

We recently watched a teaching by Joni Erickson Tada on the deeper healing of God. It was a teaching given on a Sunday morning at Times Square Church in New York. Joni brought the congregation to their feet and she gave possibly the most anointed teaching I have ever seen. She spoke on her 50 years as a quadriplegic who has sought physical healing but never received it.

Today, she thanks God for her wheelchair, because through her suffering God has been able to do a deep healing and transformation of her soul. The suffering has accelerated her sanctification. I can say “amen” to that, and when we are sick and are not healed we need to co-operate with God in His higher purposes.

I have been greatly afflicted over the past 10 years. A positive result is that I am very dependant on God, and am not free to do my own thing.

Nevertheless, I believe we are living in a *kairos* time in God when He wants to restore healing to the Church in a much greater way.

*“For the Lord will not cast off forever, Though He causes grief, Yet He will show compassion, According to the multitude of His mercies. For He does not afflict willingly, Nor grieve the children of men (Lamentations 3:31-33).”*

*“Come, and let us return to the Lord; For He has torn, but He will heal us (Hosea 6:1).”*

*“Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13: 8).”*

The Lord also speaks of those whom “I have afflicted” in Micah 4:6.

No article on healing would be complete without Isaiah 53:4&5:

*“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.”*

If we have faith in the above Scripture we will see healing.

In our lack of faith, Romans 10:17 is a help. It says that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Don’t just content yourself with one teaching a week, on a Sunday. Read the Word of God for yourselves every day. Preferably aloud.

God worked unusual miracles by the hands of Paul, “so that even handkerchiefs or aprons were brought from his body to the sick, and the diseases left them and the evil spirits went out of them.” Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could see that sort of thing happening today?

Jesus said that the Church would do greater miracles than He did.


Many people in the church like to use natural remedies for their ailments. Herbal remedies are fine, but rather avoid alternative treatments such as homeopathy, acupuncture and acupressure – which are steeped in the occult and Eastern mysticism.

As we get older, our bodies are perishing, “yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.” So we can expect degeneration physically.

Proverbs 10:27 tells us that the reverential fear of the Lord prolongs our days.

So, truly, Beloved, we need not fear negatively. We need not fear the devil. Our times are indeed in His hands. My intention is not to condemn, but to bring a Scriptural aligning with the Word of God in our attitude to healing. We are thankful for medical advances, but God is still ultimately in control.

Finally, Romans 8:36-39:

*“As it is written: ‘For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’ Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* 





# An amazing end-time prophecy

by David Wilkerson (1931-2011)

**I**N the Old Testament, Habakkuk gives us an amazing prophecy about the end times. This praying prophet's name means "embraced by God." Scripture indicates Habakkuk was a man who wrestled with the Lord faithfully in prayer. And his prophecy came during a time of gross immorality.

Judah and Jerusalem were backslidden, and God's people brazenly disobeyed his laws. The entire society was given over to self-love and materialism. It was a generation whose increasing sensuality caused it to resemble Sodom. Religion had become nothing more than ritual, merely a form to be followed, with no spiritual power. So, the Lord spoke to this praying prophet, revealing to him the awful judgement that would befall his backslidden people.

What was this judgment? God said he would raise up the enemy Chaldeans as his rod of correction and chastisement. "For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs (Habakkuk 1:6)."

A violent, wicked army was descending on the land, sent by God himself. When the Lord revealed this terrifying word to Habakkuk, the prophet exclaimed: "What I heard made me tremble. My lips quivered, and I felt terror in my bones. Now I had to wait patiently for the days of distress to come (3:16, my paraphrase)." It was a horror so unthinkable that Habakkuk's entire body quaked when he heard it.

How was Habakkuk's message received by the people of his day?

No one believed the prophecy that this praying man delivered. It was simply too horrible to consider. What was Habakkuk's response to this rejection? He was shaken to his soul. He complained to God, "O Lord, how long shall I cry, and you will not hear? Even cry out to you, 'Violence!' and you will not save (1:2)."

Habakkuk was saying, in short: "How can this be, O God? I have interceded endlessly, beseeching you to bring revival to your people. I have prayed with such faith, such hope – but revival never came. Why have you ignored my prayers?"

Suddenly, Satan began to flood the prophet's mind with doubts and questions. Soon Habakkuk became tormented over God's apparent silence. The prophet cried out even more desperately, "Lord, how can you be silent to all my heart's cries?"

## Why don't you act?

Here was a godly, praying man whose faith was under severe attack. His frustrations grew so deep he even began to make accusations toward God: "You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wickedness. Why do you look on those who deal treacherously, and hold your tongue when the wicked devours a person more righteous than he (1:13)?" In other words: "You sit silently, God, while evildoers abuse and repress your people. Why don't you act?"

To Habakkuk, it appeared that God stood by passively, not acting at all. It

seemed that as wicked men grew stronger, God's people grew weaker. And it continued with no judgement being visited on the wicked.

Today, God's people are voicing the very same complaints.

Everywhere, you hear these cries from God's people: "Lord, why are you silent as your name is being cast out of our schools, our courts, our society? Why do you allow sinners to pervert your law and flaunt wicked behaviour? How can you permit pornographers to flood mainstream media with such demonic filth? Why do you allow modern theologians and church leaders to mock your very divinity? Why do you seem to tolerate such suffering in the world?"

The truth is, hell has unleashed a violent army of demonic principalities and powers, all in an effort to destroy the faith of God's elect. Indeed, what we are witnessing today is an all-out battle against a faith that claims Jesus is God in flesh.

What was Habakkuk's reaction to the approaching Chaldeans in his day? The prophet shut himself up in prayer, determined to hear a word from the Lord. He pledged not to leave his secret place until the Lord answered his cry.

Yet Habakkuk didn't try to change God's mind about the fearful chastisements being sent on society. Rather, this godly man only wanted answers to the doubts plaguing his spirit: "Why are you silent to my prayers, Lord? Why are you not answering my cries?"

Habakkuk declared, "I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and



watch to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer when I am corrected (2:1)."

I hear many preachers today trying to explain the unanswered cries of those who face great sufferings. These ministers preach sermons that try to justify the many afflictions God's people endure. The truth is, no one can fully understand why godly people endure awful pain for months, even years, at a time. I know of righteous people who have multitudes praying for their healing, and yet all those dozens of prayers seem to go unanswered.

What is it you have been petitioning God about? Your marriage? A child gone wrong? Finances? Is there a promise you've been given from the Lord, yet you see no evidence it is coming to pass? Does God seem to be silent about your request?

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## No answers to your cries...

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Perhaps you're receiving no answers to your cries. So you cry out along with Habakkuk, "How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and you won't hear? I cry to you, and you do not save (1:2, my paraphrase)."

Habakkuk finally had tasted enough of his doubts and fears.

The praying prophet eventually cried out in desperation, "I need a word from the Lord!" That was when he shut himself away in prayer, determined to hear from God.

Habakkuk said, in effect, "I have set myself to watch and wait until the Lord speaks to me. Let him reprove me, correct me. All I know is I need an answer to all my doubts. I have to have a word to give to the church, as well as for the peace of my own heart."

God never did explain to this prophet why the wicked gain power and force their will upon the righteous. He never answered Habakkuk as to why he seemed silent to his cries. This had to baffle the faithful prophet.

Habakkuk certainly expected God to provide him with explanations. He surely must have thought the Lord, in his mercy, would reveal why he seemed silent and why his promises seemed to fail. Maybe God would explain to him the calendar of future events concerning Judah and Jerusalem. But no such explanations were forthcoming.

Beloved, at times it's going to seem as though God is ignoring your pleas. No

matter how often you fast or pray, your unsaved loved one continues to live in sin. Or, your marriage seems to get worse, your misery dragging on day after day. Or, perhaps you suffer endless physical pain.

Instead of getting sweet relief from prayer your problems only seem to pile up higher and higher. So, you ask, "Why, God? Please, just explain why my prayers aren't being answered."

We all need a sure word from the Lord. And Satan has won if he can convince us that our Lord doesn't hear or answer us. Indeed, this is the reason why so many once-zealous believers no longer pray in earnest. Secretly they think, "Prayer doesn't work for me. God just doesn't hear what I say."

As for Habakkuk, he was determined to wait in the Lord's presence, seeking God in prayer. It was there the Lord spoke to him, saying in essence: "Habakkuk, I am going to give you a word that answers all your questions. This word will put an end to all your doubts. And it's not only for you but for my people – indeed, for all, unto the very end. I want you to write down what I tell you now, so that all who hear it may run."

Beloved, are you running the race? God has a word for you that will enable you to do it. This word is found in Habakkuk 2:4: "Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith."

Do you understand what God is saying here? He was telling the prophet and the whole nation of Judah, as well as his people today: "Get your eyes off those proud, arrogant Chaldeans. Don't worry about the hard times to come. I'm going to bring all my enemies down, in my time. I tell you, my glory is going to cover the whole earth. Meanwhile, the just shall live by faith."

The Lord was saying: "Habakkuk, here is the only word you will ever need, to see you through any and all hard times. Trust in the Lord. Live by faith."

When Satan infuses wicked, unbelieving thoughts into your mind, you are not to fear them. The enemy wants you to believe you are as wicked as every thought he plants in your mind. But your response to every such accusation must be, "These are not my thoughts. They are planted by the wicked one."

At such moments, you are to tell the powers of hell in no uncertain terms: "I trust my God to deliver me, devil. And I reject all of these thoughts from you. You can't take control of my mind. The Holy

Spirit lives in me. Jesus is with me, and he has made me pure in his sight."

At times Satan will try to torment you with condemnation. He'll bring up every sin and failure from your past. But that is precisely the time you are to trust in the Lord. Trust his word to be true, and hold on to your faith. Faith alone is the ark that will see you through your flood.

We each have heard this word throughout our Christian lives: "Believe! Trust God in all things." We read it from Genesis to Revelation. It is preached by Moses, Daniel, Job, David, the prophets, Paul, Peter, John, and of course most notably Jesus.

Indeed, the word that God gave to Habakkuk has been taught for centuries by pastors, teachers and evangelists: "The just shall live by faith."

I have preached this word dozens of times myself, but I can assure you it is easier preached than practiced.

With the word of the Lord established in his heart, Habakkuk delivered a message of warning – and of faith – to God's people:

"Though the fig tree may not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines; though the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food; though the flock may be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls—yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength; he will make my feet like deer's feet, and he will make me walk on my high hills (3:17-19)."

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## God of the impossible

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The setting that Habakkuk describes here is the collapse of an economy. The prophet is predicting famines, food shortages, loss of income, lack in all things. But in spite of these dire things to come, the prophet trusts. He is convinced God is still God through every famine and hard time. The Lord is the same God who opened the Red Sea, who provided for his people in the wilderness for 40 years, who has never failed his people in any age.

I know I have faith when I can truly say, "My God is the God of the impossible. And, live or die, I am his. I cast myself into his arms. He will see me through, even unto death and all eternity."

Dear saint, learn to praise God in the good times and in present times of testing. When things look hopeless, faith rises up in the praises of God's people.

Amen! 





# What Difference Does It Make?

by Jonathan Brentner

**“WHAT difference does it make?” Hillary Clinton made this question famous during her Senate questioning of what happened during the September 11, 2012 terrorist attack on the American embassy in Benghazi. Although she did not regard the questions she faced as important, I am sure the answers to those questions mattered to those who lost loved ones in the attack.**

Many ask similar questions in regard to future things. What difference does it make what I believe about the Lord’s return? Does it really matter if I am watching for it or not? People have been waiting centuries for Him to come again. Should I look for it to happen anytime soon, or in my lifetime?

These issues have led to much indifference even among believers regarding the Lord’s return. Many are not watching for it while some do not believe it will happen anytime soon, if at all.

Does living with an expectancy of Jesus’ imminent appearing really matter? Absolutely!

Let me explain.

## **The Importance to the Lord of Such Anticipation**

Even though Jesus knew there would be a lengthy delay, He instructed His followers to both watch and be ready for His return (Matthew 24:42&43; 25:13). Throughout the New Testament, we see this same

posture of waiting with an expectation that He could appear at any moment (Romans 8:23; Titus 2:11-13; 1 Peter 1:13; James 5:8&9).

These early believers obeyed Jesus’ command to watch for His return.

Would Jesus have commanded us to do something if it was not important to Him? Would Jesus ask His followers to look for His return as something that could happen at any time if it was a useless exercise in futility? I do not think so.

Readiness for Jesus’ appearing is something important to Him, and beneficial to us as well.

## **The Benefits to Us of Such an Outlook**

I see several benefits to us in the New Testament of living with perspective that Jesus could return at any time. Such anticipation:

### **Kindles purity in our lives**

After writing about Jesus’ appearing, the apostle John added these words in 1 John 3:3, “And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.” The prospect that Jesus could return at any moment kindles purity in us; it causes us to be much more mindful of walking in the power of the Holy Spirit so that we have victory over sin.

If you truly thought it was possible that Jesus could return tomorrow, would it make a difference in how you live? Of course it would. You might change your mind regarding what movie you watch

tonight. Your thoughts as you go to bed would be different. You would be eager to resolve any conflict with your spouse or to deal with unforgiveness toward someone in your life. You would be more conscious of using your gifts and abilities to serve the Lord.

You would want to be ready to meet Jesus!

### **Keeps a two-world perspective alive in our hearts (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)**

The apostle Paul endured much suffering as he preached the Gospel throughout the Roman Empire, yet he never lost heart. As he compared eternal realities with the temporal things of this life, he said this: “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2 Corinthians 4:17).” Paul’s two-world outlook focused his attention on the joys and glory ahead for him in eternity as he endured his beatings, scourging, imprisonments, and shipwrecks.

Without the hope of Jesus’ soon return, we would soon lose our anticipation of heaven. The things of this world would take on much greater importance compared with the wonders of forever.

### **Encourages us in the midst of suffering (1 Peter 1:3-6)**

In writing to believers suffering under the weight of persecution, the apostle Peter immediately reminded them of their “living hope” and of their inheritance that was “imperishable, undefiled,



and unfading, kept in heaven for” them (1 Peter 1:3&4). He reminded them of the substance of their hope. Regardless of what they experienced on earth, they had a glorious reward waiting for them in heaven at the end of their suffering.

#### **Motivates us to use our spiritual gifts in making disciples (Philippians 3:14-21)**

I believe Paul’s determination to press forward in His service to the Lord came from his anticipation of Jesus’ soon return. I believe this was the “prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (verse 14) that he further described in verses 20-21.

C.S. Lewis said this about such an outlook: “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since because Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that

they have become so ineffective in this.”

#### **Keeps the hope of a better day before us**

Revelation 21:4 says, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” The focusing of our thoughts on Jesus’ soon return constantly reminds us that a better day is coming, one in which all sorrow, death, and mourning will be things of the past.

While most believers hope for this glorious future day, the sense of imminency in Jesus’ return keeps these things in sharper focus. This also works to minimise the frustrations and disappointments of this life as we realise that a much better day is coming. Setbacks in this life are just temporary; an eternal day is just around the corner. A time of unending joy awaits us with Jesus’ appearing!


#### **Results in a special reward**

2 Timothy 4:8 refers to “the crown of righteousness” that the apostle Paul says is for “all who have loved his appearing.” Even if we do not see His return for us in

our lifetime, Jesus will someday reward our longing for it.

The signs of the approaching tribulation, however, remind me that the time is short. The fires, famines, rumors of war, earthquakes, and increasing talk of the coming new world order all tell us that Jesus is coming soon. The signs around us are increasing exponentially with each passing week.

If you are experiencing sorrow, feeling hopelessness, or facing opposition or heartache because of your faith, do not give up hope. Keep your focus on the better day that is coming for all of us who are in Christ. When Jesus comes for His church, He will give us imperishable, resurrected bodies; and we will be with Him forever with bodies that will never age and never again experience pain or sickness. We will experience endless joy beyond our imagination throughout eternity.

Keep looking up; a much, much, much better day is just ahead. Such anticipation makes a significant difference in how we view our lives. 

## The call to forsake all

by Michael Carl

*“And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, ‘Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ They immediately left their nets and followed Him (Matthew 4:18-20).”*

**WHAT did it mean when Jesus strolled the shore of Lake Galilee and call those men to serve Him without reservation? Well, in one way or another, it meant a complete surrender to Jesus.**

When they heard Him say, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me (Mark 8:34),” they eventually learned that He meant it.

For most of them, it meant dying for the Lord. We know from *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* that all of the original Apostles, except John, went to a martyr’s death.

Thomas, not realising the full impact of what he was saying, said it correctly when he said in John 11, “Let’s go back to Judea so we may die with Him.”

Yet, we have to ask today, what does it mean when Jesus says, “Follow me and I will make you fish for people?” Is there any real meaning behind Jesus’ own words, “If any want to become my followers, let them

deny themselves and take up their cross and follow Me,” for us today? Do we really believe this or have Christ’s own words simply become a romanticised exercise in a formulaic religious contemplation for today’s 21st Century Christian?

In truth, we have to come to terms with the reality that if we don’t really believe He means what He says in these passages, then in fact we are denying the truth and efficacy of God’s Word.


As one of my teachers along the way said, “We’re professing believers; but in fact, we’re practical atheists.”

The good professor was blunt, but brutally true. When it comes to obeying the Word of God, we don’t do too well with the passages requiring personal sacrifice.

Folks, this must change. If we’re ever to realise the depth and beauty of a vital relationship with our Lord, we have to let go and be willing to trust Him with ALL of His Words.

Are we willing to do that?

If not, then our practical doubts are going to rob us of the very meat and meaning for which we deeply long.

Let us resolve this day that we’re not going to be spectators; we’re going to take a step from the shore, wade in and fully become “a fisherman.” 





# Celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation

by Dr Timothy J. Demy

**THE Protestant Reformation swept across Europe like a theological tsunami affecting every social, political, and religious institution in existence in the West. And its effects remain a part of western culture and permeate it 500 years later.**

In its wake a new world was created.

No other event in the then almost 1500-year history of Christianity had been so tumultuous. And like a tsunami, there was more than a single theological wave moving over Europe and crashing against the established Catholic Church. The Reformation consisted of several movements of renewal and reform, even though we usually think of them as one big thing we call the Reformation. It was profound and generated long-lasting consequences.

From its inception, advocates, critics, observers, theologians, and historians have called the Reformation many things, among them: a revolution, a religious hurricane, a heresy, an evolutionary process, and a score of other things.

Metaphors, analogies, and depictions of it abound. In a sense, many of them are correct or overlap in their description. Few people in the last 500 years have denied the Reformation's significance and its lasting influence.

The Reformation was indeed, many things. It was social. It was political. It was economic. It was cultural. But fundamentally and at its core, it was theological.

## *The Beginnings*

Popular understanding of the Reformation dates to All Souls' Eve, October 31, in the liturgical calendar of the year 1517 and to the actions of a German theologian and university professor named Martin Luther. However, the actions of this monk with a mallet, posting a call for public debate on the door of the church in Wittenberg was not the work of a single individual igniting a firestorm on his own. There had been precursors. Ideas never

arise in a vacuum.

Just as a tsunami begins its powerful surge starting far out at sea and miles from the unsuspecting landmass it approaches, so too did the Reformation begin years before Luther's posting of the infamous "95 Theses." There long had been growing swells of discontent within Christianity in the West.

The world of medieval Catholic (Latin) Christianity, out of which the Reformation arose, was multifaceted with strengths and weaknesses. In the experiences and views of the Reformers, the latter outweighed the former. For them, Catholicism and Christianity in the West had become an impersonal and ecclesiastical bureaucracy that favoured the hierarchy that controlled it at the spiritual and financial expense of the laity.

Some, desiring reform in the Church, believed that it could be accomplished best by remaining within Catholicism. Others, diametrically opposed, argued for withdrawal. And yet others hoped to bring reformation from within, but gradually conceded the necessity of withdrawal. Reform caused multiple responses.

## *Reform Efforts*

For a couple of hundred years, at least, there had been a growing concern regarding papal power. For example, this concern had been addressed at the 1415 Council of Constance in which the council declared in a document called *Sacrosancta* that the authority of a general council was superior to the authority of the Pope. The Pope abrogated the document but the concern remained.

There also were some attempts for reform within individual geographic and ecclesiastical regions as well as within some monasteries, but it remained sporadic and uncoordinated.

One positive development in the years before the Reformation was the rise of lay devotion communities that emphasised spirituality and holy living in daily life



for everyone. Within this movement were individuals such as Thomas à Kempis (1380-1471), whose devotional book, *The Imitation of Christ* became and remains very popular.

A corollary to this movement was an emphasis on contemplation and prayer (often resulting in mysticism). Martin Luther owed much to the German mystic Johannes Tauler and the work *Theologia Germanica*.

Two strong pre-Reformation movements that challenged the ecclesiastical power and hierarchy of the Catholic Church as well as fundamental doctrines of Catholicism were the Lollards in England and the Hussites in Bohemia. The former, inspired by John Wycliffe (1320-1384) and the latter by John Hus (d. 1415), gave strong criticism of the practices and theology of Catholicism, including the Mass and devotion to saints.

Further, Wycliffe maintained that Scripture interpreted in a literal sense should be normative practice and the sole criterion for belief and the Christian life. To this end, he and his associates translated the Bible into English so that it could be widely read and studied, rather than having to rely on hearing it read in Latin in church by a priest.

It was in this same spirit that English Bible translator William Tyndale would declare 100 years later (in the English of his day), "I defie the Pope and all his lawes. If God spare my life, ere many yeares I wyl cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture, than he doust."

Although Tyndale was executed in 1536 in Belgium, much of his work influenced the King James Version (1611) of the Bible.

Intellectual Trends and Social Changes

Within the intellectual life of the pre-Reformation world the currents were changing. For many years, an intellectual frame- work





known as Realism (scholasticism) had prevailed as found in the work of one of its foremost proponents, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the author of the great theological treatise *Summa Theologica*. These thinkers wanted to marry Greek philosophy, logic and thought with Christian theology and the teachings of the Church.

In opposition to this view there arose the school of thought and counter-frame work known as Nominalism. Nominalists, led by people such as Duns Scotus (d. 1308), argued that reason and logic were insufficient for the truths of revelation. These, he argued, depended ultimately on the faith of the believer.

Debate such as this continued in the pre-Reformation years and, in part, was possible because of the rise of Christian Humanism during the Renaissance that focused on the rediscovery and growing accessibility of ancient texts of classical authors and the early Church Fathers. The desire and ability to read these authors in Greek in which they were originally written also influenced greatly the study of the New Testament in Greek by Christian Humanists such as Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466-1536).

Social changes such as the rise of schools and universities, the growth of towns and cities, and the invention of the printing press significantly helped in increasing literacy and spreading new ideas through wide dissemination of books and pamphlets.

### *Political Trends*

As theological protests and calls for reform increased and became widespread, the Church could only effectively eliminate dissent by relying on the growing power of secular rulers and these princes and authorities had to be

persuaded that the action was necessary. The political power of the papacy and Catholicism was weakening.

Throughout the Reformation era, as the core theological ideas of the movement spread geographically, the tug-of-war political power contest between the Catholic Church and the local magistrates, princes, kings, and queens also ensued. The theological debates and struggles were accompanied by political and social struggles.

### *Technological Developments*

The advent of the printing press in the years before the Reformation enabled widespread dissemination of the Bible and its teachings. It also put the Bible within reach for the average man and woman and in their own language, as illustrated by Luther's translation of the Bible into German (1522 and 1534) and the work of others to create the influential Geneva Bible (1557 and 1560) that was printed in English and was a precursor to the King James Version (1611).

The ability to disseminate the biblical text widely and relatively inexpensively compared to handwritten copies of it enabled the reading and study of the Bible to flourish and spread. An example of this is the fact that in addition to the introduction of chapter and verse markers, the Geneva Bible had study notes added to the margins of the text so that readers could study the text individually or in small groups.

### *The Impact of the Reformation*

The foremost idea and most important outcome of the Reformation was the reaf-

firmation of the central idea of Christianity – the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Corresponding to the revitalised centrality of the Gospel in Christian faith and practice was belief in the right of every individual to interpret the biblical text and the Christian faith rather than have it presented from a centralised authority. Luther's radical idea of the "priesthood of all believers" emphasised the ability, the right, and the legitimacy of individuals to engage in intimate knowledge of, communication with, and relationship with God. This had spiritual and social consequences.

Spiritually and theologically it meant that the individual Christian had the power and responsibility to nurture their own spiritual lives. This built on the earlier Renaissance shift in the understanding of humanity and individual responsibility to God as men and women created by God in His image.

One consequence of this shift in the understanding of humans and their relationship with God was a change in the medieval concept of spiritual vocation, whereby those who entered the priesthood or a monastery or convent were thought to be more important spiritually than others.

Luther's emphasis on the priesthood of all believers meant that there was to be no dichotomy between the spiritual world and the world of daily life. The work of the farmer, baker, shipwright, seamstress, carpenter, or teacher had equal significance to the cleric, monk, or nun.

Indeed, English reformer William Tyndale declared that washing dishes and preaching the Word of God were both pleasing to God and without essential difference. (Out of this model and idea of the 1530s came what has been called "the Protestant work ethic." It was that but it was much more – it was a part of a comprehensive Christian worldview.)

### *Five Key Doctrines*

The theology of the Reformation crystallized around five central doctrines. In the nearly 1 500 years since the New Testament era and founding of the Church, much had occurred in the development of the doctrine and practices of the church – some of it biblical and some of it not biblical. Out of the morass of medieval theology, spiritual practices, and ecclesiastical power, the Reformers sought to reaffirm the central theological ideas and "to contend for the faith that was delivered

# Celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation

## Continued...

to the saints once for all (Jude 3)."

In so doing, they emphasised five beliefs that were at the core of the Reformation. Called "solas" from the Latin word for "alone," these biblical ideas permeated the Reformation. A systematized formal list of these five ideas did not arise until after the Reformation but each of the ideas was present during it and some of the ideas such as *sola gratia* and *sola fide* were utilised together by the Reformers:

*Sola Scriptura* – This phrase means "Scripture alone," and was an idea and emphasis that was quickly applied. With respect to salvation, the Bible provides the content of salvation. The Bible was understood to be the final authority in matters of doctrine and practice rather than Cardinals, Councils, or the Church. It means also that Scripture interprets Scripture.

A central idea of the Reformation was the belief that the Bible was capable of being understood by all Christian believers and that every believer has the right to interpret the Bible for himself or herself and to have every interpretation taken seriously – a very democratic idea.

*Sola Gratia* – This phrase means "grace alone" and emphasised the biblical view that salvation is solely by grace – it is the means of salvation. Salvation does not come through works or because of the spirituality of other Christians who acquired extra grace or excess grace through their works.

This latter idea was part of the idea of a "treasury of merit" that accumulated in heaven because of the holiness of saints and from which people on earth could draw through the purchase of indulgences that would then benefit them or their living and deceased loved ones. It was the selling of such indulgences by papacy (in part to fund the building of St Peter's basilica in Rome) that was the tipping point for Luther.

*Sola Fide* – This phrase means "faith alone" and reiterated a central teaching in the New Testament, especially the book of Romans. The appropriation of salvation comes through faith alone. Coupled with *Sola Gratia*, it affirmed that salvation

comes as an act and gift of God to individuals solely because of their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Nothing is or can be added to such faith to gain eternal life.

*Sola Fide* and *Sola Gratia* are affirmations of Paul's words in Ephesians 2:8&9: "For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift – not from works, so that no one can boast."

*Solus Christus* – "Christ alone" offers access to God the Father based upon His substitutionary death on the cross. Christ alone is the basis of a person's salvation. Jesus Christ is the sole mediator between God and humans. Paul declared in 1 Timothy 2:5&6: "For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, Christ Jesus, Himself human, who gave Himself – a ransom for all, a testimony at the proper time." The Reformers affirmed this wholeheartedly.

*Soli Deo Gloria* – is a phrase meaning "glory to God alone." With respect to salvation, glory to God alone is the reason a person strives to live a life pleasing to God.

With this phrase, the Reformers meant that all of life and every aspect of life was meant to bring glory to God.

## Five Historical Traditions

The five doctrines noted above formed the core of Reformation theology, a theology that enabled every person to directly enter into a personal relationship with God through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. As the theological tsunami of the Reformation spread across Europe and the British Isles, it was shaped by the culture, people, and leaders of particular areas and in conjunction with history of Christianity to date in those areas.

There was turmoil, conflict and dissent. The historical traditions developed against the backdrop of political power plays between princes and cardinals, emperors and popes, and persistent greater threats such as the military and religious presence of the Ottoman Empire pushing inwardly in Europe. And yet, the Reformation spread rapidly.

Out of the unity of the five doctrines there arose diversity of expression leading to five major historical traditions within the Reformation. If one asks today "why are there so many denominations in Protestantism?" the answer rests in part on the five historical traditions of the Reformation.

Why are there Lutherans? – the Reformation. Why are there Presbyterians? – the Reformation. Why are there Baptists? – the Reformation. Why are there Anglicans and Episcopalians? – the Reformation. Why are there Mennonites and Quakers? – the Reformation. Today within each of the five strands or traditions there are many groups, each with its own history and theological emphases, but all of them are rooted in the Reformation.

### The Lutherans

Apart from precursors of the Reformation such as John Wycliffe, John Hus, and others leading up to the 16th Century, the first major tradition of the Reformation is that of the Lutheranism that arose from Luther's historic call for reform. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was the undisputed leader of it and was assisted and succeeded by Philip Melancthon (1497-1560).

It was a German movement and was firmly rooted and established within 20 years of Luther's death. Like other traditions of the Reformation, one by-product of the movement was an increased appreciation for and development of access to education for many people, regardless of their social status.

### The Calvinists

The second major tradition was that of the Swiss Reformation and the ensuing Reformed Tradition. In Switzerland the leading reformer was the German-Swiss leader Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531). In the French regions of Switzerland (and in France) the Reformation leaders were John Calvin (1509-1564) and Theodore Beza (1519-1605).

The ideas of these reformers, collectively termed Calvinism, spread throughout France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and into England and Scotland. Interacting with the currents of reform locally in these regions, there was enormous dissemination and growth in what would emerge as Presbyterianism and the larger Reformed Tradition. This is especially true of the work of John Knox (1505-1572), known as the "Reformer of Scotland."

### The Anglicans

The third Reformation tradition was that of the English Reformation and the Anglican tradition. Though it began under the reign of Henry VIII and his desire for a divorce that the papacy would not sanction, the break with Rome became in time a distinct strand of the Protestant Reformation. Henry VIII essentially made the Church in England, the Church



of England but ideas of reform soon followed.

For more than 100 years there was a religious tug-of-war and a military civil war in England as Catholic and Anglican monarchs ascended to the throne, but in the end Anglicanism prevailed and spread throughout the world as the British empire came to dominate global activity.

When the American colonies broke with the British and gained independence, the Anglican Church in the new United States became the Episcopal Church.

### **The Baptists**

The fourth tradition was the Baptist tradition. Some historians see it arising on the European continent and as an offshoot of people who had disagreement with the work of the German-Swiss leader Ulrich Zwingli and some of his theology.

Other historians acknowledge the continental influence but believe today's Baptists are more the product of the English Puritan movement of the 17th Century that gave rise to English Baptists rather than the 16th Century Mennonite tradition. Origins aside, no one disputes the emphasis on believers' baptism by immersion and the spread of Baptists, especially in the English-speaking world.

### **The Free Churches**

The fifth and final tradition is what is sometimes termed the "Radical Reformation." Whereas the Reformed, Lutheran and Anglican traditions sought to maintain much of the social-political world of their day and saw some unity between the Church and the State (and is thus termed the "Magisterial Reformation"), the Radical Reformation sought a full break between the realms of the Church and the State (thus the term "Free Churches" is often used).

Notable within the Radical Reformation are the Anabaptists (a name given by opponents) such as Menno Simons (1496-1561), the Society of Friends (Quakers) founded by George Fox (1624-1691), and the more violent and extreme Thomas Müntzer (1490-1525). Eventually dissenters within the Anglican tradition would combine with some Baptists and Anabaptists and there would emerge the Congregational churches that were part of much of the American Puritan experience.

### **Summary**

There was complexity in these five traditions but more important, there was unity in the overarching belief that reform



was necessary. The Protestant Reformers differed on aspects of theology, church government, and the relationship of the Church to the State but they did not differ on the need to change the existing church. They had social and cultural differences but shared a common theological desire.

### ***A Comprehensive Worldview***

The significance of the Reformation rests not only in what it accomplished theologically, but in what it accomplished in the broader Western culture as well. It provided a biblical framework for many of the ideas of the next 500 years, enabling Christians to develop a comprehensive worldview.

Whether one looks at science, education, economics, art, political philosophy or music, there is the imprint of the Protestant Reformation. Because the Bible was being read and interpreted in a new way the biblical text was understood to be foundational to every discipline and every area of life.

\*Thus, the medieval prohibitions against usury (lending money) gave way to fuller understandings of the biblical passages dealing with that subject and the rise of capitalism emerged. There is a direct link between Calvinism and economic entrepreneurialism.

\*Hymns and music were written for congregations to sing in their own language just as they read the Bible in their own language.

\*The idea of kings and queens ruling by divine right gave way to the rise of democratic ideas of government.

\*The Reformation idea of "power to the people" with respect to reading and interpreting the Bible had many consequences – diversity of interpretations, increase in and support of literacy, education and Bible translation.


The theological tsunami of the Protestant Reformation changed the world. What began in the hearts of individual women and men 500 years ago was soon applied with their hands as they literally carried the Gospel of Jesus Christ around the globe and applied it to daily life. It was theological at its core, with ideological ramifications affecting every area of culture and society.

In the 62nd of Luther's 95 theses, he declared: "The true treasure of the Church is the most holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God." In making this declaration Martin Luther was reaffirming the words of the Apostle Paul written in his letter to the Romans (1:16&17): "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith.'"

This passage of Scripture had been instrumental in Luther's spiritual awakening, his "reformatory breakthrough" as he called it, and it remained so throughout his life.

### ***Conclusion***

The Protestant reformers were bold. They challenged more than a thousand years of history and tradition. They believed the Bible and the truths contained in it, and they demonstrated daily the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the truths of the Bible to change lives and history.

The Protestant Reformers gave us a legacy, and they challenge us to believe and act daily upon the truths we read in the Bible and to apply those truths in every area of our lives – private and public. Ideas have consequences! 

# Martin Luther

## A CAPTIVE TO GOD'S WORD

by Dennis Pollock

**I**F one were to read the book of Acts, which describes the phenomenal power and growth of the early Church, he would have to assume that within a few centuries Christianity would surely conquer the whole world. Sadly, the opposite proved true.

Within a few generations the power and the life of the early believers had been reduced to formal ceremony and dead liturgy. Biblical knowledge perished, and ignorance and superstition flourished.

The Church of Jesus Christ became increasingly impotent, corrupt and irrelevant. Even the knowledge of the most foundational of all Biblical questions – “How do we obtain peace with God?” – was lost.

### Luther's Early Years

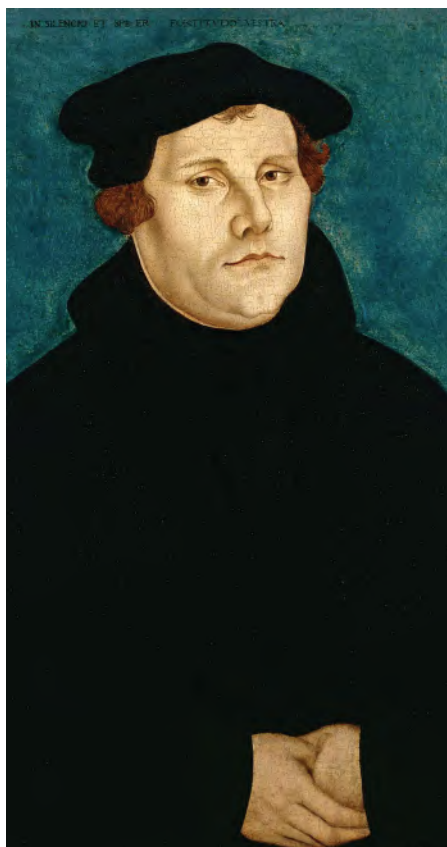
Such was the state of the Church when a baby boy named Martin Luther was born in 1483. Martin's strict, no-nonsense father soon realised his son was brilliant and began making plans for him to study to become a lawyer. Martin earned a bachelor's degree in a single year and a master's degree after that. His sharp mind enabled him to do well in his studies, but he had far more interest in religion and philosophy than he did in law.

Luther, always sensitive and often moody, wondered where he stood with God. One day as he was returning to the university after a visit home, a thunderstorm arose. As the lightning and thunder crashed all around him, he feared for his life and called out in desperation to Saint Anna, vowing to become a monk if she would spare his life. When he survived the storm, he kept his word and entered a monastery.

### A Zealous Monk

Luther went to the monastery not only to fulfil his vow to Saint Anna, but also to save his soul. Like the rest of his generation – including the priests and bishops – he knew nothing of salvation by grace or the nature of the new birth. But to his thinking, the monks, with their austere lifestyles, vows of poverty and chastity, and constant prayers and church services, represented the apex of holiness.

Luther entered his new vocation with a passion, and determined to be the monk of monks. He practiced self-denial by frequent fasting and sleeping outdoors in



the winter without a blanket. He prayed constantly and beat himself with a whip to show God how sincere he was in his desire for holiness and salvation.

Luther later wrote, “I was a good monk, and I kept the rule of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I!”

But his conscience was never satisfied. He began to see God as a cosmic reflection of his earthly father: stern, cold, and utterly impossible to please.

It took a trip to Rome to begin the process of disillusionment. In the Catholic Church, Rome was the essence of all that was pristine and godly. When he went there on a brief assignment, Martin was thrilled beyond words. If ever there should be a suitable place for him to obtain the peace he sought, it would surely be here.

### The End of the Beginning

Upon arrival, he indulged in all the city had to offer, running from one shrine to another, attending masses, and racking up all kinds of spiritual points by visiting the tombs and viewing the bones of dead saints.

But soon his bubble burst as he began to see the carnality church leaders he had assumed would be shining examples of holiness and purity. Sexual immorality was rampant, masses were said hurriedly and without passion or meaning. Nobody seemed to take God seriously.

### An Academic Challenge

In 1511 Luther was transferred to a small monastery in Wittenberg, Germany. Here

he would serve under a wise priest named Johann von Staupitz. This man seemed to understand something about grace, and Martin's quest for peace with God.

Discerning that the young monk needed to get his eyes off himself and on to the Scriptures, he assigned Martin the task of serving as professor of the Bible at the University of Wittenberg. Luther became a Bible teacher, which meant he must first become a student of the Scriptures. As he immersed himself in the Bible, his razor-sharp mind quickly began to see the vast disparity between what he had been taught and what the early Church believed. Martin Luther was on his way to becoming an evangelical.

### A Life-Changing Discovery

In time Luther discovered the simple truth that would forever change history and shake the mighty Catholic Church to its foundations: “The just shall live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38).”

He began to see that salvation was not a prize to be earned by long prayers and self-abuse; it is a free gift provided through the Cross and resurrection of Jesus and received by faith.

### The Protest

Luther's historic break from the Catholic Church came as a result of a campaign of the pope to raise revenue for the Church through the sale of indulgences. Current church thought was that even the best of Christians must suffer in purgatory after death for perhaps thousands of years while their sins were burned out of them.

However, it was thought that the pope had the authority to somehow dispense with centuries or even millennia of such terrible anguish with a simple letter of indulgence. “Time off” was granted for the viewing of sacred relics, such as a dead saint's bones or even a tooth, but especially popular with the Vatican were the indulgences granted for financial donations given toward favourite projects.

Johann Tetzel, appointed by the pope as seller of indulgences to Germany had even come up with a jingle to remind the peasants of the power of the indulgence: “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, the soul from Purgatory springs.”

In 1517, Tetzel came near Wittenberg and began to sell indulgences. When his own parishioners began to grab up these spiritual bargains, Luther exploded.

By now he saw clearly that forgiveness was a matter between the individual and Christ. The Church could proclaim forgiveness through Jesus but could not make it happen and certainly could not sell it!



Luther responded by writing a blistering article with 95 points, or theses, attacking the sale of indulgences and the Church's motives behind this practice. He posted the article on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg. Luther had no idea what a storm that little article would unleash.

The article was so radioactive that it was soon published and spread all over Germany. Luther exposed the spiritual nakedness of the Church, and Germans by the thousands, who had always resented the Church's autocratic ways and financial demands, began nodding in assent.

What historians now call The Reformation was on!

It didn't take long for the Vatican to hear about this new heresy. They responded by a combination of threats and attempts to defend the indefensible. But the proverbial genie was out of the bottle, and there was no way the pope and all his cohorts could stuff it back. Luther was eventually excommunicated.

But by the time the spiritual death-certificate arrived, Luther was completely unimpressed, throwing it in the fire. In a written response to being severed from the Church he had once loved and served, Luther wrote caustically:

*"This condemns me from its own word without any proof from Scripture, whereas I back up all my assertions from the Bible. I ask thee, ignorant Antichrist, does thou think that with thy naked words thou canst prevail against the armour of Scripture?... and as they excommunicated me for the sacrilege of heresy, so I excommunicate them in the name of the sacred truth of God. Christ will judge whose excommunication will stand. Amen."*

### A Man of Courage

It took incredible courage for Luther to take the stand he did. The Catholic Church had the power to put heretics to death, and it was more than willing to use that power. In the first years of his protest Luther lived with the thought that he probably would soon be burned at the stake. Somehow this didn't slow him down in the least from writing scathing articles and books denouncing the teachings and hypocrisy of the Church. Amazingly, by the providence of God, he was not martyred.

Luther lived out his days and finally passed away at the age of 62 from a heart attack. Within 10 years of his public attack upon the Church, the vast majority of northern Germany had left Catholicism for some form of Protestantism.

Luther left behind two great treasures for the believers. For the body of Christ

at large he restored to them the truth Paul had asserted so long ago: "Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)." And to his fellow Germans he gave them another priceless gift – he translated the entire Bible into the language of the people. Until then only the Latin scholars could read the Scriptures, but now everyone could read the doctrines of grace for themselves.

### A Man of Excesses

Without question Martin Luther was a mighty instrument in the hands of God. He certainly had his flaws, and he wore them on his sleeve. He could be harsh, crude, sarcastic, extremist, impatient, and often grumpy. He was also guilty of pressing the doctrines of grace to extremes until they became nearly heretical. For instance, in his determination to show that salvation is "all of grace" he wrote:

*"Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world. We will commit sins while we are here, for this life is not a place where justice resides... No sin can separate us from Him, even if we were to kill or commit adultery thousands of times each day..."*

This is a far cry from the apostle Paul's attitude about Christians who sin, when he asked, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it (Romans 6:1&2)?" John declares, "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1 John 2:4)." Paul warns that adulterers "will not inherit the kingdom of God." So it is hard to see how someone who committed adultery thousands of times each day (if that were possible) would have any right to enter heaven at the conclusion of his lecherous life.

### An Anti-Semite

One of the most disgusting of Luther's many excesses and errors was his attacks on the Jews. In his early days, he was tolerant of the Jews and reminded his followers that Jesus was a Jew. He encouraged Christians to treat the Jews kindly in the hope that some might come to Christ.

But in his later years Luther became disillusioned about the prospect of Jews turning to Jesus. As an older man, Martin Luther concluded that the Jews were simply too hard-hearted to be saved by Christ, and that they had thus been eternally rejected by God.

Once convinced of this, Luther's attitude toward the Jews changed dramatically. He unleashed his anger at the Jewish people in

a booklet entitled, *On the Jews and Their Lies*. It was horrible. In it Luther called the Jews a "base, people, that is, no people of God... full of the devil's faeces... which they wallow in whoring like swine."

Worse still he advised Christians to burn all Jewish schools and synagogues, confiscate all Jewish literature, prohibit rabbis to teach on pain of death, deny Jews safe conduct on the roads, and appropriate their money to be used to support Christianity.

Luther's encouragement of violence toward the Jews is so horrific it can hardly be believed. How in the world could a man so powerfully used of God to wake the Church from her slumber be so filled with hatred?

There is no excuse for Luther's outrageous and violent outbursts against the Jews, and without a doubt many Jews suffered terribly as a result of his anti-Jewish writings. We can and should condemn his terrible outbursts against the Jews.

Adolf Hitler admired Luther and acknowledged him as one of Germany's great champions. In Hitler's own persecution of the Jews, he clearly took a page from Luther's playbook in saying, "by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord."


The truth is, Martin Luther did not improve with age. As he became older his success, fame, and popularity seemed to exacerbate his tendencies toward grumpiness, crudeness and anger. He became the proverbial grumpy old curmudgeon.

### Conclusion

All of this is puzzling to us. We all recognise that no one is perfect, but we prefer our leaders and heroes to at least have minor flaws and warts – not monstrous ones that bring damage and pain to people.

Yet imperfection has never stopped God from making use of His chosen instruments. Luther was precisely what the times called for. He was fearless in the face of threats, tireless in his proclamation of the truth of salvation by grace, and brilliant in his written exposes of the immoral, corrupt and disingenuous Church of his day.

Unlike most monks and priests in those dark times, he actually read the Bible and held unflinchingly to the truths he discovered. Some things he got terribly wrong but the main thing he got very much right – we are indeed saved by grace through faith. Above all else, Martin Luther was a man who took God seriously.

Such a simple thought – who would believe it could start a revolution: "The just shall live by faith!" 



by T.A. McMahon

*"Bless the Lord, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name (Psalm:103:1)!"*

**WHAT** does it mean to "Bless the Lord?" What does it mean to "bless?" The latter is a bit easier to define than the former, but when it comes to definitions, especially of terms that relate to Scripture, I like to see how the 1828 *Webster's Dictionary* (accessible online) defines it. Nearly all of the explanations given there for "bless" and "blessed" include examples of their use from the Bible (Genesis 2:3; 28:3; Deuteronomy 15:4; 33:11; Psalm 103:1; Jeremiah 4:2; Luke 9:16; Revelation 14:13).

Many of the other terms found in the Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* also feature examples from God's Word. I remember the first time I used this dictionary. I wanted to get a better understanding of the word "blasphemy."

My thinking was that it simply meant using the Lord's name in vain. That is an example of blaspheming, but it misses a main explanation of the word cited by Webster: "Blasphemy is an injury offered to God, by denying that which is due and belonging to him, or attributing to him that which is not agreeable to his nature."

In other words, the term also has to do with mischaracterising God and therefore includes all the false teachings that abound about God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. It goes without saying that no contemporary dictionary defines words by referring to the words of God.

So what does Noah Webster's dictionary say about "bless" or "blessed?" He begins with the definition "expressing a wish or desire of happiness," e.g., "Isaac blessing

Jacob (Genesis 28:3)." Then he adds "the desire to make happy; to make successful; to prosper in temporal concerns;" as in "we are blessed with peace and plenty." Deuteronomy 15:18, he notes, declares "The Lord your God shall bless you in all you do."

Revelation 14:13 tells of those who die in the Lord being blessed for eternity. Consecration for God's purposes is found in Genesis 2:3: "And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it."

"Blessed" means to consecrate by prayer; to invoke a blessing upon, as in Luke 9:16: "And Jesus took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven He blessed them."

It also includes praising and glorifying God for all of the blessings we have received.

Then we come to an aspect of blessing that is mostly lost today, and that is – blessing God. I remember that for months following the Islamic terrorist attack of September 11, 2001, on the U.S., the foremost rallying cry was "God bless America!"

That was certainly something we all very much wanted. But that wish begs one critical question: why should God bless America? Even a cursory look at where America is heading spiritually should give one second thoughts about God blessing us.

Why should God bless America? The litany of offences against the righteous God could fill the rest of this article. Anyone who balks at using the term "antichrist" to characterise America is either (a) spiritually burying his head in the sand, or (b) clueless regarding the teachings of the Bible, God's holy Word.

For those who may be of that mindset, consider the issues of abortion, homo-

sexuality and gay marriage, marijuana legalization, prayer censorship in schools, evolution, transgenderism, increasing legislations directed against biblical beliefs and practices, such as public preaching and evangelising, even against public praying and witnessing.

Whatever is opposed to the teachings of Christ is antichrist and quite obviously cannot receive the blessings of God. Tragically instead, America will collectively reap what it has sown. In Jeremiah 4:2 we learn that "The nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory." If the "in Him" is missing, so is the blessing.

Yet for some, the reaping will be blessings: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he who sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not (Galatians 6:7-9)."

Our blessings are due to our blessing God: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name (Psalm 103:1)." That involves a host of things, including our praise, our worship, our adoration, our submission, our obedience, our thankfulness, and our trust in Him, all of which please our Lord and Saviour.

## Enoch's testimony

The testimony of Enoch found in Hebrews 11:5&6 incorporates pleasing God and the resulting blessing: "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."

Some believers tend to shy away from seeking God's blessings as an overreaction to the corrupted teachings of the "prosperity preachers." But that can be as wrong as the false teachings themselves, leading to not pleasing or blessing God by not obeying His Word.

Clearly, these verses declare that we must "believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." When the "seek Him," however, takes a back seat in favour of pursuing the



reward, God is no longer being blessed.

Our blessing the Lord is the antidote for a wrong emphasis on His blessings or for taking His blessings for granted. When we begin with Him – when He is our focus – we will be motivated to do things His way. That's blessing God!

Therefore, blessing God should be our first concern as believers, and the foundation of that is revealed in the "first and great commandment:" "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength (Mark 12:30)." That certainly reflects the "O my soul: *and all that is within me*" of Psalm 103:1.

## Loving God will manifest in obedience

And the command to "love the Lord your God" will manifest itself in obedience to Him: "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If a man loves me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and We will come to him, and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep not My sayings: and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent me (John 14:23&24).'"

Disobeying God's Word is the antithesis of blessing God. Jesus indicated as much in His admonishment of those who claim to love Him: "And why do you call me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say (Luke 6:46)?"

He then added this parable as an encouragement for those who would do what He said and as a warning to those who would reject His words:

"Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you who he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great (Luke 6:47-49)."

Disobedience leaves a man foundationless and subject to great ruin.

Not doing what God says quite obviously does not bless Him, but what about not being thankful for what He has done for us and continues to do for us? "Bless the

Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits (Psalm 103:2)," includes *all* of His benefits. Yet how many of our meals have gone by without blessing God for them? No big deal? Well, Jesus thought thanking His Father was important enough to set the example for us, whether feeding the thousands or having a meal with His disciples.

What should be a big deal is blessing God in thanks for what took place on Calvary's hill, Golgotha, where they crucified our Lord and Saviour.

"And He took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and gave to them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.' Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you (Luke 22:19&20).'"

The most important act in the history of mankind has been, in many churches, relegated to a once-in-a-while add-on event with the elements served up in businesslike efficiency in order to expedite the experience.

When that takes place as little more than a custom, it's wrong.

But even given the misuses of communion, we can be grateful that that's not the only time the overwhelming sacrifice of Jesus is remembered. Even so, it's terribly grievous that thanking God for His "unspeakable gift (indescribable, far beyond being expressed in words) (2 Corinthians 9:15)" seems to have fallen away.

But that's not new for God's people. In Psalm 95, which contains wonderful words of blessing God, we nevertheless find God warning His people not to slip away from Him as their fathers did, losing sight of His ways, falling into temptation, and consequently rebelling against Him. "*Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms. For the Lord is the great God, And the great King above all gods. In His hand are the deep places of the earth; The heights of the hills are His also. The sea is His, for He made it; And His hands formed the dry land. Oh come, let us worship and bow down; Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture, And the sheep of His hand. Today, if you will hear His voice: 'Do not harden your hearts, as in the rebellion, As in the day of trial in the wilderness, When your fathers tested Me; They tried Me, though they saw My work. For forty years I was grieved with that generation, And said, 'It is a people who*

*go astray in their hearts, And they do not know My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest (Psalm 95).'"*

Those are glorious words followed by a serious warning. It's comparable to the admonishment Jesus gave to the church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:4&5. Those believers, the bride of Christ, had "left their first love." The consequence would be losing the light of God's words and turning away from His truth.

## Righting the wrongs of not blessing

Psalm 96, on the other hand, rights the wrong of failing to bless God as it looks forward to Christ's Second Coming.

*"Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples. For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the Lord made the heavens. Honour and majesty are before Him; Strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. Give to the Lord, O families of the peoples, Give to the Lord glory and strength. Give to the Lord the glory due His name; Bring an offering, and come into His courts. Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness! Tremble before Him, all the earth. Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns; The world also is firmly established, It shall not be moved; He shall judge the peoples righteously.' Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; Let the sea roar, and all its fullness; Let the field be joyful, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the woods will rejoice before the Lord. For He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, And the peoples with His truth (Psalm 96)."*

Lastly, blessing God by extolling His attributes must be a major part of our witnessing. As the psalmist wrote, "Sing to the Lord, bless his name; show forth his salvation from day to day (Psalm 96:2)." "The Lord has made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen (Psalm 98:2)."

This reveals the purpose of blessing. Too frequently we hear the words "God bless you" (even shortened to "God bless") reduced to an empty gesture following a sneeze or the closing of correspondence. God does indeed bless, as we noted, but it would serve us all better in this day of overwhelming self-preoccupation if we would give priority to blessing God.

*With grateful acknowledgements to the Berean Call.* 



# 10 Theses for a new Reformation

by Dr Michael Brown

**I**N every generation, the church takes some steps forward and some steps backward. Some old truths are rediscovered, but other foundational teachings are forgotten; some scriptural emphases are recovered, while basic gospel practices are abandoned. What are some critical, fundamental areas that need reformation today?

**1) We must re-emphasise the centrality of the cross.** So much of our preaching today focuses on everything but the death and resurrection of Jesus and emphasises everything but the cross and the blood and the exaltation of the Son of God. And we have all but ignored the implication of the cross, namely, that Jesus died for us so that we would live for Him.

That's why we have produced consumers more than disciples: We have failed to preach the cross and we have failed to take up the cross, and so the Gospel has become all about us rather than all about Him. Recovering the centrality of the cross helps us regain our spiritual equilibrium, also producing a hatred of sin and a love for holiness. It also jars us back into reality: We have been bought with a price and we now live to do God's will (1 Corinthians 6:20).

**2) We must reconnect to the Jewish roots of the faith.** Why do we have two

separate holidays, Passover and Easter? Why do so many think that when a Jewish person becomes a follower of Jesus, he or she is no longer Jewish? Why is it commonly taught that the church is the new Israel and that God is finished with the old Israel?

It's because the church has boasted against the (original) Jewish branches (to use the language of Paul in Romans 11:17-25) and cut itself off from its Jewish roots. It's because Jesus has been turned into the founder of a new, predominantly Gentile religion rather than embraced as the Jewish Messiah who came to fulfil what was written in Moses and the Prophets, thereby bringing salvation to the Gentiles. This does not mean that saved Gentiles should become Jews and submit to the Sinai Covenant, but it does mean we should build on the Old Testament rather than discard it, that we should recognise God's ongoing purposes for Israel, and that we should prioritise Jewish evangelism (Romans 1:16).

**3) We must live out the reality of the priesthood of all believers.** Although the Reformation emphasized that every believer was a priest, it did not fully implement this concept, because of which the clergy-laity contrast remains to this day. Luther wrote that "all Christians are truly of the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them, save of office alone... A cobbler, a smith, a peasant, every man has the office and function of his calling, and yet all alike are consecrated priests and bishops, and every man should by his office or function be useful and beneficial to the rest, so that various kinds of work may all be united for the furtherance of body and soul, just as the members of the body all serve one another."

Unfortunately, many believers do not recognise the divine calling on their own lives, because of which (in the words of Wolfgang Simson), "The image of much of contemporary Christianity can be summarised as holy people coming regularly to a holy place at a holy day at a holy hour to participate in a holy ritual lead by a holy man dressed in holy clothes for a holy fee."

This has had a crippling effect on our mission, resulting in a tiny portion of believers doing the great majority of Gospel work. And while the New Testament certainly teaches the important role played by leaders in the body, every believer is equally a child of God, a member of the body, a branch of the Vine, and a priest to God, called to serve Him and touch

the world.

**4) We must embrace the fullness of the Spirit and His power.** It is true that "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" proclaims that "the Spirit and the gifts are ours" (this is not far from Luther's original German), and it is true that there are examples of divine healing and deliverance in the writings of the Reformers, but there was certainly not a full embracing of the Spirit's gifts and power outside of the Spirit's work in conversion.

Because of this, practices that were foundational to the early believers (see Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 14:1, 39&40; James 5:13-16) became foreign to the later church. Thankfully, while there has been a great restoration of the Spirit's power in the last 100 years, especially in the growing church in the developing world, there is still great resistance to key aspects of the Spirit's work in much of the West. Regaining the fullness of the Spirit is essential if we are to make the maximum impact on the world and bring maximum glory to the risen Saviour.

**5) We must become Great Commission believers.** In our materialistically rich culture, with so much competing for our attention, from entertainment to sports to news to worldly pursuits, we have lost sight of eternal issues and, consequently, lost the burden to go into all the world to make disciples.

Political issues inflame us, sporting events excite us, movies and TV and the internet consume us, but our hearts have grown cold when it comes to reaching the lost. Do we even believe that people are perishing without Jesus? True love for God means true love for our neighbour, not only materially but spiritually as well. And as we give ourselves to win the lost, we experience revival ourselves, as new souls are the life of the church.

**6) We must abandon the performance mentality.** Pastors and worship leaders are not professionals performing for an audience. They are servant leaders helping believers grow in God and encounter His presence.

In our zeal to be relevant and do all things with excellence, we have become talented performers, putting more emphasis on outward appearance than on inward encounter and measuring success by the praise of people more than the praise of God.

Many believers have become accustomed to being entertained rather than edified and coddled rather than challenged. We must change our mentality and our focus



if we are to become true disciples of the Lord. It is commendable to do God's work with excellence and diligence, but we must remember that it is only the Spirit who can save and transform and that He is looking for faithfulness more than talent and for a yielded heart more than outward response. Spending quality time in the secret place with God is infinitely more valuable than consulting with church-growth experts and keeping up with the latest Twitter trends.

**7) We must learn to practice transformational inclusion.** So-called progressive Christians and LGBT leaders have rightly emphasised that the church must be a welcoming place for the marginalised and the hurting, for the outcasts and for those who are different. But they have wrongly claimed that Jesus practiced *affirmational* inclusion, as if He reached out to sinners where they were to affirm them in their sin.

Rather, Jesus practiced *transformational* inclusion, reaching out to lost sinners in order to change them, not affirm them. If we are to follow His example, we need hearts of compassion and backbones of steel. This will enable us to open our hearts and our homes and our meeting places to those who are different to us without compromising God's standards. Compassion does not require compromise.

**8) We must become biblically literate**

**again.** Through the Reformation, the Bible became available to anyone who could read. New translations were made in the languages of the people and then distributed in mass through the newly invented printing press. Now, 500 years later, we have more access to the Scriptures than any generation in history, with a multitude of translations to pick from and instant access to those translations on our phones and computers. Despite all this, we are losing our biblical literacy to the point that some of the most fundamental biblical truths are barely known to professing believers. If ever a generation needed to get back to the Bible, it is our generation. We must recover our love for the Word.

**9) We must regain a healthy fear of the Lord.** In past centuries, the church often overemphasized the doctrines of hell and final judgement, producing an unhealthy and even servile fear of the Lord, depicting Him as a cruel tyrant rather than a loving Father who is also a righteous Judge.

Today, we preach a happy gospel about a happy God who wants to make everyone happy, with hardly a word about divine judgement. God has become the great big Genie in the sky, here to do our bidding. This has resulted in counterfeit conversions and skin-deep believers. To restore our balance, we must regain a healthy reverence of God, remembering that Jesus taught us to fear Him who can destroy

both body and soul in hell (Matthew 10:28) and recognising that our gracious, compassionate Father, the one we call Abba, remains a consuming fire (Deuteronomy 4:24; Hebrews 12:29). We can love and enjoy Him without diminishing His holiness or justice. We can adore Him while reverencing Him.

**10) We must recover the organic, relational dimensions of the Body.** While God is moving today inside denominations and within the confines of our congregational buildings, He is certainly not limited to moving there. That's because the church is a body, not a building, a family, not a structure, an organism, not an organisation. That's why the Spirit is at work in mega-churches as well as house churches, in "mainstream" denominations as well as "independent" congregations. And that's why, even though our gathering together as believers is vitally important and should not be neglected (Hebrews 10:25), we should focus on being the church more than going to church, on cultivating lasting relationships more than attending services, and on being intimate with God more than being informed about God. As we deepen our relationships with the Lord and with one another, we will fulfill our spiritual destiny and become what the world so desperately needs us to be. And in that place, we will find true unity. ☞

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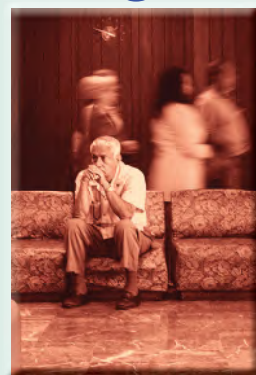
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# Retirement? It's not an option!

by Holly Spate

**W**HEN it comes to living as a Christian, we are called to carry out God's commands as we venture through this life. But, one thing we're never called to as we journey is a season of retirement. As long as we have breath, as long as we're here, we're called to live out our lives as fully as possible... no excuses.

Our heavenly Father expects us to keep going, to keep persevering, to keep utilising our gifts and talents. He wants us to continue being a blessing, to consistently speak words of encouragement, and to help those less fortunate. He desires us to keep opening His Word, applying His truths, and seeking His ways. And we're to continue all these things until we breathe our last breath on this fallen, broken earth.

2 Thessalonians 3:13 says, "And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is right. "Never" means NEVER!

I'm not a Bible scholar, but I've never read a verse in the scriptures which gave permission to stop being an effective witness for Christ. We're not called to invest a portion of our lives serving Him, and then settle down, get cozy and retire. We're not given permission to simply sit back, do our own thing, and become ineffective because we've reached a certain age or don't feel we have the gusto to keep going. God expects each of us to stay tuned into Him and to actively be about our Father's business.

We're called to serve, to keep going and to be effective regardless of our health, our circumstances, or our place in life. Retirement in the spiritual sense is simply not an option for those in God's army. We act because we're called to act. We use the blessings of our resources because those blessings reach far and wide and are used for the good of others and for God's glory.

We never give up, give in, or stop being used in the service of loving and giving to others.

We each experience different seasons in our lives, and God has blessed each of us with various talents and gifts that can be shared with others. The reality is that God has a special plan and purpose for each of us. We just have to choose to be willing participants and to be available.

There may be some reading this today who are experiencing health problems or who are physically unable to leave their homes and minister to others, yet God can still use their lives to be a blessing right where they are. If they are able to give financially to further the kingdom, they can give from the comfort of their home, sending to organisations that are meeting the physical and spiritual needs of those hurting and in need of the Saviour's hope and love.

God still calls them to be prayer warriors and to take time to bow their heads each day and grow closer in their relationship with Him. James 5:16 reminds us of the power that comes from praying: "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective." Even with physical limitations, one can make a positive impact and be a powerful prayer warrior for those who are out

on the mission field.

Others reading this may be young and physically able to rush out into the world with intense energy and share the good news face-to-face. They may be able to go on mission trips or volunteer their time at their local church. Others may be so financially blessed and successful in business that they're able to fund big projects that could potentially touch many, many lives for the good of the Kingdom.

No matter what season you may find yourself in, God simply asks each of us, no matter what's going on in our lives, to be willing participants... instruments available for use to further God's kingdom. He always desires us to be open to giving, to serving, to blessing... right where we are... right in the middle of our circumstances.

It's not about physical or financial limitations; it's about being available for service and answering the call. Remember what Jesus said in Luke 21:3&4? He said, "Truly I tell you... this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

In other words, God saw her willing heart and her desire to serve and be effective despite the season she was in. She acted out of obedience and love. God calls us to do the same. He wants each of us to have a heartfelt cry that says, "God, I'm available. Please show me what to do. Accomplish your will through my life... right here, right now, as I am."

It's about keeping our hearts open to His will in our lives and persevering till the last breath is taken. It's a command, not an option.

John 14:15 drives the point home: "If you love me, keep my commands."

May we, as Christians, never sit back and "retire" from the call on our lives, but instead keep persevering until He calls us home.

Let these additional verses stir your heart to be God's continual instrument today and every day after:


*Hebrews 6:11 "We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realised."*

*Galatians 6:9 "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."*

*Hebrews 10:36 "You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."*

*Romans 2:7 "To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honour and immortality, he will give eternal life."*

*Hebrews 12:1-2 "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."*

*Romans 15:5 "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had."* 



Thanks to  
Elizabeth Kendal

# WATCH & PRAY

## FULANI IN NIGERIA USED AS PROXIES FOR ISLAMIC JIHAD

Attacks by ethnic Fulani Muslim cattle-herders on mostly Christian, indigenous villages in Nigeria's volatile Middle Belt have escalated markedly. During the first two weeks of October, attacks in Plateau State occurred almost daily, despite a government-imposed curfew and the presence of Nigerian troops. In Bassa Local Government Area alone, 72 villagers were killed and 23 injured, 489 houses were burnt and 13 726 mostly Christian Irigwe were displaced, from a population of 80 000. Empty villages were subsequently occupied by Fulani Muslim settlers from the north. Whilst the traditionally nomadic Fulani are genuinely seeking food and water for their cattle, they are being armed and used as proxies by jihadists and other Islamists in a jihad to expand Muslim territory at the expense of Christians. Please pray for Nigeria and its Christians.

## CONTINUING DETERIORATION OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN RUSSIA

Although Russia was officially Christian for more than 1 000 years, some Protestant groups were considered "dangerous sects" and were severely persecuted by the State in the 19th Century. After the Russian Revolution in 1917, atheism was propagated, all religions were persecuted and many

church leaders were martyred or spent decades in labour camps. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was a short period of religious freedom and a spiritual revival across its former republics. Many people accepted Christ. However, Protestant Churches experienced restrictions on their outreach. In 1997, further restrictions resulted in religious freedom worsening. A package of Kremlin counter-terrorism measures enacted in July, 2016 included prohibition of any outreach activity outside church premises. This particularly affects three million Protestant Christians. Please pray for Russia and its Church.

## CHRISTIANS SEVERELY PERSECUTED AND CHURCHES TIGHTLY CONTROLLED IN UZBEKISTAN

Uzbekistan, formerly a republic of the Soviet Union, is in the middle of Central Asia. During the Soviet era, atheism was state policy and religion was severely persecuted. Islam is 93% of the population and Christians just 5%. Compared with other Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan is where Christians are most severely persecuted. Those suffering most are Christians from a Muslim background. Churches are infiltrated by spies and police raid believers' homes. There is only one

small Protestant seminary in Uzbekistan. Christians can lose their livelihood if their faith becomes known. The new government tries to give the impression of positive change, claiming there is an atmosphere of religious harmony and openness.

Unfortunately, in reality this is not observable and persecution remains much the same.

Please pray for Uzbekistan and its Christians.

## CHINA: CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE CONFINED IN AN 'INFINITE DARKNESS'

When Gao Zhisheng, committed Christian human rights attorney and religious liberty advocate, emerged from three years' secret detention in

August, 2014, many surmised he was "utterly destroyed." Confined to house arrest and denied access to medical care, Gao (who has survived appalling torture) could have withered and died, but he did not – he recovered. Despite intensive supervision, Gao wrote both a memoir and a 40-page report on human rights in China. These secret writings were smuggled out and have since been published. On August 13, Gao "disappeared." Recently Gao's supporters discovered that he is being held in a secret prison in Shaanxi Province, in solitary confinement, in total darkness and denied access to medical care. They fear for his life. Please pray for Gao and for China and its Church.



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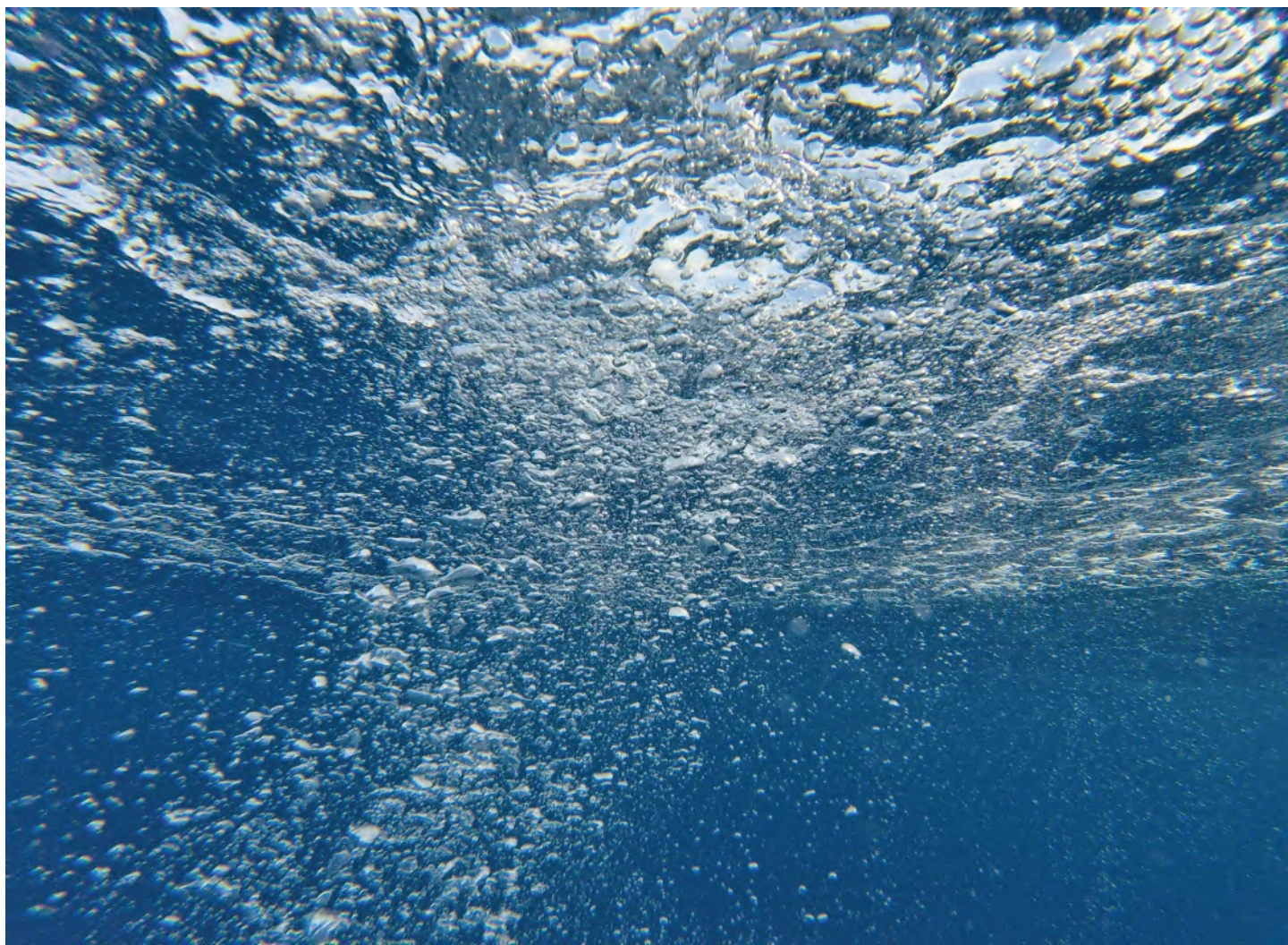
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# Christ

## The True Spring Of Life

by J. C. Ryle

*"I am the vine, you are the branches: He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit: for without Me you can do nothing (John 15:5)."*

**LET us seek to "abide in Christ" more thoroughly than we have hitherto. Christ is the true Spring of Life in every believer's soul, the Head on which every member depends, the Cornerstone of all real sanctification.**

Whenever I see a child of God becoming less holy than he was, I know the secret of it – he is clinging less firmly to Christ than he did.

Our root must be right, if our fruit is to abound.

Brethren, let us strive after close union and communion with Christ. Let us go to Him more often, speak with Him more frequently, trust Him more wholly, look to Him more constantly, lean upon Him more entirely.

This is the way to go through the wilderness without fainting, and to run the race set before us with patience. Let us live the life of faith in the Son of God. He is the Vine, and we are the branches; let all our strength be drawn from Him – separate from Him we can do nothing.

He is the Sun of Righteousness – let us seek our comfort in Him, and not in our own frames and feelings.

He is the Bread of Life – let us feed on Him day by day, as Israel on the manna, and not on our own experiences.

Let Christ become more and more all things to us – His blood our peace; His intercession our comfort; His Word our warrant; His grace our strength; His sympathy our support; His speedy Coming our hope.

Let others spend their time on other things if they will, let us rather study to learn Christ.

We know a little of Christ as our Saviour, but Oh! how small a portion have we seen

of the fullness that is in Him!

Believe me, if we only realised the blessedness of free and full forgiveness in Him, we should be men of a different stamp. The man who feels the blood of atonement sprinkled on his conscience, the man who enjoys assurance that he is washed, and justified, and accepted in the Beloved – this is the man who will be holy indeed, this is the man who will bear much fruit.

He will labour cheerfully, he will suffer patiently, he will witness confidently, he will press on unflinchingly, he will love warmly. Redemption is ever fresh upon his mind, and his thought is, "What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits (Psalm 116:12)?"

Brethren, let us cleave to Christ more closely. Let us draw near to the Cross. Let us sit at the feet of Jesus. Let us drink into the spirit of the apostle, when he said, "to me to live is Christ (Philippians 1:21)..."

Let us do this, and we shall grow. ☞