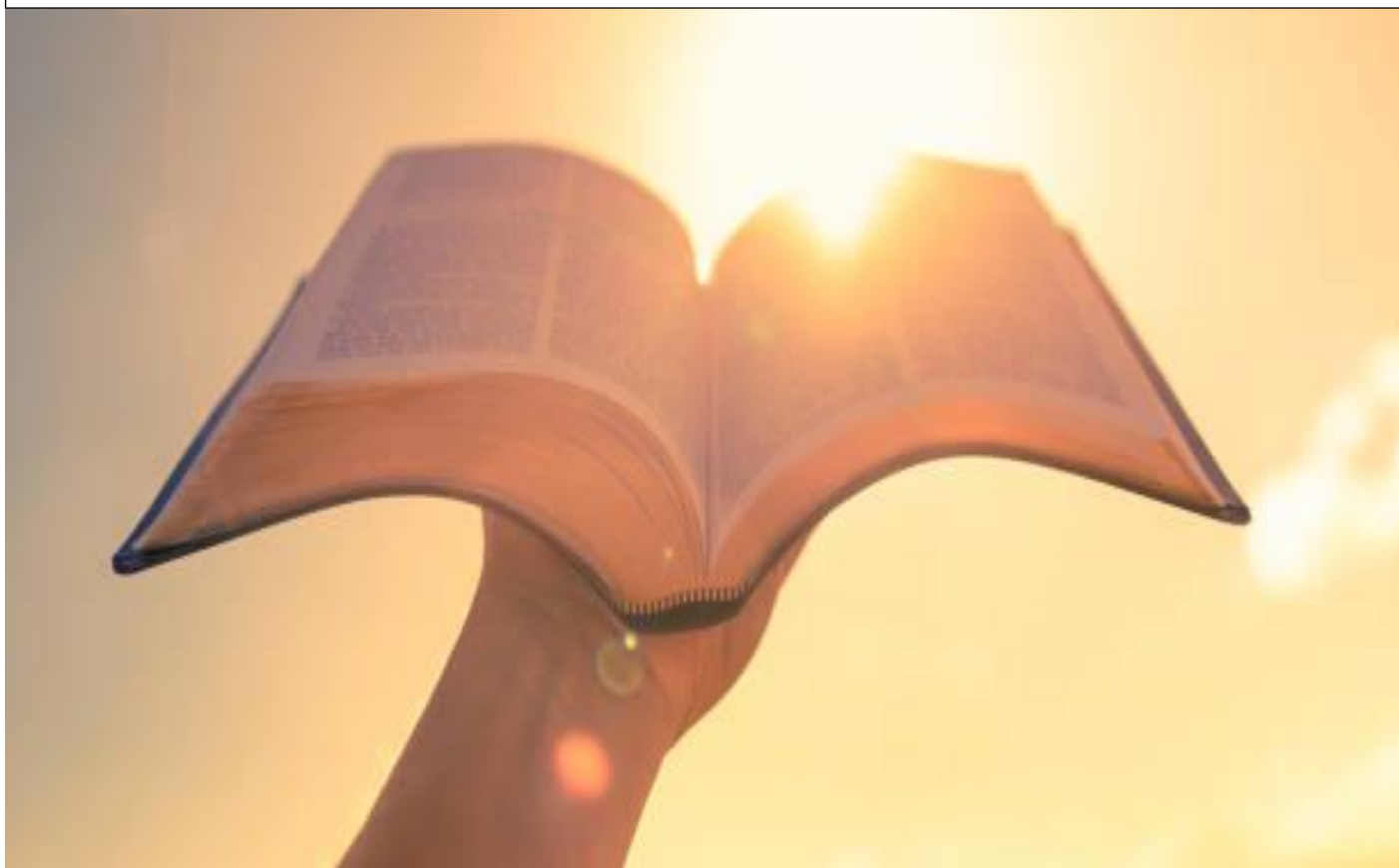




Truth To Wonder

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Contents

A Sportsman's Mentality - pg 3
Is Being A 'Good Person' Enough? - pg 5
Cellular Corruptions - pg 6
Dangerous Errors Of Origen - pg 7
Spiritually Lazy? - pg 9
Jesus Christ Our Saviour - pg 10
Refusal To Be Weak - pg 11
Be Not Afraid - pg 13
Dangers Of Skim Reading - pg 16
Persecution In China - pg 18
The Magnitude Of Divine Foreknowledge - pg 19
A Breath Of Fresh Air - pg 20
The Life Of William Cowper (1731-1800)- pg 20
Ramifications Of Needless Division - pg 22
Resource Corner - pg 24
A Final Thought - pg 27

A Sportsman's Mentality

In 2 Timothy 4:7, we have the Apostle Paul using the imagery of a disciplined athlete having finished their race, accomplishing their objective, to describe the diligent life of a true believer in Christ. The Apostle Paul used the imagery of the Olympian on different occasions, to further highlight the need for discipline and sacrifice as a part of any believer's faith. Whilst many pastors, preachers and ministers seem to struggle with this Scriptural reality, increasing numbers of sportsmen are filling the outspoken void on this important subject.

Back in the Spring of this year, a professional NBA basketball player for the world-famous Chicago Bulls, was released from his highly paid spot on the team because of his stand against Pride month and LGBTQ+ movements. He was released by the Bulls due to what was deemed as "conduct detrimental to the team", a conclusion seemingly arrived at by his online 'rants' (as Google reports on the event) on the aforementioned issue. Bear in mind, that the NBA has agreed a 9 year, multi-million-dollar deal with the United Arab Emirates, a state where LGBTQ+ activity is strictly illegal (the love of money is the root of all evil - 1 Timothy 6:10). The player, Jaden Ivey, has reportedly retired from the NBA to focus on his faith and preaching opportunities. He hasn't stepped back from his comments or convictions in order to protect his career, but appears to have accepted the sacrifice that many throughout history will know to be true, all for the defence of God's Word.

This news is not an isolated incident of an elite sportsman publicly speaking out regarding their faith, or on matters that contravene their belief in the Holy Bible's eternal words. Yet why is it such people, who are in many ways leading the defence that many Christian leaders are reluctant to engage in, are the ones doing so? Could it be as simple as the fact that sportsmen/women have a familiarity with the significance of sacrifice for a productive life? Any successful sportsperson will tell you to make it to the top, sacrifice is a necessity. Not a preference, a necessity. Bad and lazy habits must give way to efficiency, discipline, structure and drive, if any success is to come to fruition. In short, ease and comfort of a worldly life, must be sacrificed so that productivity and success can take their place. This acceptance of sacrifice to achieve desired goals is what separates the accomplished sportsperson from the average one. Tom Brady, the legendary American football quarterback, the most decorated player in the history of the game, observed that he wasn't the most naturally gifted player. He was however the most determined, the most willing to sacrifice what others weren't, so as to attain his lofty goals. If this is true in the physical world, it can be argued it is even more so in the spiritual. There are numerous pitfalls of modern life that can make faith more palatable, easier and less intrusive on our fleshly desires. Yet when these are indulged in and not sacrificed at the foot of the Cross, then spiritual strength fit for attaining wonders of knowledge and communion with God, are sadly lost.



As Christians, we are not pursuing a Superbowl ring, an Olympic medal or a World Cup trophy. We are however, pursuing something far, far more precious, a crown of righteousness. We should all view this mortal life as exactly as what the Apostle Paul framed it as, a race, one waiting to be engaged in with maximum effort, so as to attain the highest possible award. Let's not be mistaken, the Holy Scriptures make it clear that our labours in Christ's name shall be rewarded in eternity. If we labour greatly for Christ and the Gospel, we shall be rewarded with amazing wonders in Heaven. If we labour only a little, though we are still saved, our reward will be little in comparison to what it could've been. Such things will be determined at the Judgement Seat of Christ (the Bema Seat - 2 Corinthians 5:10).

Yet again, let's not be mistaken, on hearing this we are not to labour intensely for Christ to gain eternal rewards, that is disingenuous. We are to labour for Christ and the Gospel in joyful thanks that we have been made righteous by His atoning sacrifice. By doing so, our labour doesn't threaten to make us disillusioned or bitter towards God, when it seems our efforts in His name aren't being recognised. We sidestep this pitfall of grieving the Spirit, and instead are doubly blessed by the gracious hand of God. We are blessed so firstly, by

the simple fact that God, in His awesome grace, shall reward all labour done lovingly and humbly in His name. Secondly, that we are blessed in the here and now with the peace of God that we are doing His will and glorifying His gracious name. Do not underestimate this heavenly peace. It is a true peace that the most powerful and wealthy people on the planet are searching for in vain; yet it is yours and mine through Christ Jesus.

Such wonders of Heaven cannot be ours though, if we are not willing to let go of the rope that is attached firmly to the ways of the world. Too many Christians have been sold a lie that they can have their 'best life' here and now, with all the worldly pleasures we all desire in our fallen flesh, along with eternal glory. Such a suggestion would be rightly denounced as utter rubbish by any sportsman if it were framed in the material sense. No sportsman would agree that you can have the glory of being an elite champion and stuff your face with junk food every day, constantly sleep in in the mornings, cut gym sessions/training, etc. If you want glory, you must be prepared to make sacrifices. If we want eternal glory, we must be willing to sacrifice the real but very temporary pleasures of this sinful world.

Reading this, we could begin to think this all sounds like a 'works based' approach to salvation. Well, it really isn't, to the praise of God. How do we know this? By Scripture. Scripture spoken by Christ Himself no less. In Matthew 16:24, Christ makes it very clear that unless we are willing to deny our fleshly, sinful desires, take up our cross and follow Him, we are not His followers. Such a statement doesn't sound like an invitation to 'live your best life now', in the manner that Joel Osteen, Joyce Meyer and the like often promote. We are called to sacrifice to show that our claim to believe in Christ Jesus is a true and real faith. It must show it's not just a 'faith' that exists, because as Voddie Bauchman put it, we're a "fan of Jesus". Fans aren't sportspeople. Fans sit and watch and applaud the exertions of the sportspeople they admire, but they often have little drive to seek to join the sporting arena. It is those who avidly follow the sacrifices, the methods, the techniques, the passion of successful sportspeople, that go on to likewise become successful sportspeople. In a similar way, it is those who are truly followers of Jesus, those who avidly look to follow the sacrifices, the methods, the traits, the passion of Christ, are the ones who will know the greatest reward from His gracious hand.

Such an approach is what those of the time of Jesus' earthly ministry understood by the term of a 'follower' of a teacher. To 'follow' a teacher in ancient Judea, meant a complete abandoning of your former life, a willingness to literally follow your teacher wherever they went, at any time of day or night. You would share every meal with them, all the days eventualities with them, all in the hope of learning everything possibly available to learn from your teacher. Knowing this then, we begin to see the immensity of faith that the disciples showed when Jesus looked upon them and issued the simple command of "Follow me" (Matthew 4:19). A command they knew the significance and cost of, and yet did so willingly, not out of cold duty, but in faith and love. This is how we are to live our faith each day. This is the manner in which we are to follow Jesus Christ. In all honesty though, how many of us who call ourselves followers of Jesus, are actually behaving in the manner the Bible references? It would serve us well to question ourselves on this important matter and correct our ways accordingly.

Again, let's be clear, I am not suggesting in any way, shape or form, that we can through our own efforts, appease God and attain glory. This is all done through our Saviour Jesus Christ. What I am saying however, is that acceptance of sacrifice, something that many Christians are reluctant to do, displays who our heart adores. If we are not prepared to sacrifice, we are not prepared to love. Simple as that. If a husband is not prepared to sacrifice himself for his wife, then he cannot claim to love her, and vice versa. Willingness to sacrifice is the hallmark of love. When we really think about it, such selfless, sacrificial love isn't a loss of anything worthwhile anyway, it's a willing, joyful giving in search of what is worthwhile. That's the happy truth of it all. As any great sportsman will tell you, they gladly sacrificed what most people clamour for, because all they wanted was to reach their goal, their objective, their hearts love. Christ **gave** Himself because His goal, His objective, His love was to secure salvation for repentant sinners. If we are not **willing to give ourselves fully to Christ**, then we have no business hoping for an eternal reward, let alone eternal life!

Is Being A 'Good Person' Enough?

As Josh McDowell observed, such a view as thinking, ‘As I good person, I should get to Heaven when I die’, is a statement that begins with a flawed presumption. It presumes that mankind is inherently good. Therefore, it seems wrong that God would send an inherently good person to eternal hellfire for a few errors of living in the brevity of mortal life.

The problem as you may have noticed, is that mankind, according to the Holy Bible, is not inherently good. Instead, it is inherently wicked and sinful. Therefore, no one has the right to presume a place in Heaven just because of who they are. In fact, quite the opposite is the case, as because of our natural sinfulness, we are right to presume a place in Hell, not Heaven as the starting point for our eternal destination. As C.S Lewis commented, “When we say that we are bad, the ‘wrath’ of God seems a barbarous doctrine; as soon as we perceive our badness, it appears inevitable, a mere corollary from God’s goodness.”

The Bible makes it clear that we are loved by God, but that we have each rebelled against His wondrous love. This rebellion was total, leaving the entirety of our nature corrupted by sin. The theologian Wayne Grudem noted, “It is not just that some parts of us are sinful and others are pure. Rather, every part of our being is affected by sin – our intellects, our emotions and desires, our hearts (the centre of our desires and decision making processes), our goals and motives, and even our physical bodies.” Therefore, God never sends a good person to Hell, because in reality, there is no such thing as a good person. The Holy Bible makes this sobering point repeatedly (see Psalms 14:3, Romans 7:18, Titus 1:15 and Mark 7:20-23 as just a few examples).

Throughout history, we can see the evidence of these Scriptural statements in the evils conducted by mankind. The anthropologist, Clay Jones, spent decades looking at the history of evil conducted by mankind. He studied the atrocities committed by the Nazi’s, communists in Russia, China and Cambodia, the horrific Japanese camps in WWII, genocides in Uganda, Sudan and many other awful events all orchestrated by mankind. When he came to conclude his investigations, Clay wrote:

“I first began to study human evil so that no one could disqualify me for having glossed over the immense sufferings that people perpetrate on each other. I didn’t want anyone to say that I had gotten God out of the problem of evil the easy way: by making evil seem less serious than it really is. But as I read about one sickening rape or torture or murder after another, something strange happened: I was struck that evil *is* human. I realised that heinous evils weren’t the doings of a few deranged individuals or even hundreds or of thousands, but were done by humankind *en masse*. I studied continent after continent, country after country, torture after torture, murder after murder and was staggered to discover that I hadn’t taken Scripture seriously enough: humankind is desperately wicked.”

This is the reality of the nature of humanity. Every single, last one of us is so affected. We are all desperately wicked, leaving us falling very short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). To argue then that mankind is inherently good and therefore worthy of a place in Heaven is incorrect. It is not just our actions that proves this to be true, but the very fallen nature of our hearts that means no one can declare themselves a ‘good person’. What we can accurately label ourselves is a wicked person, deserving of judgement.

Yet this is where the Gospel is truly the good news! It gives us the hope filled message that God has not left us to be doomed to eternal destruction for our inherent wickedness. Instead, He loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son, so that in repentance of sin and the placing of faith on Jesus Christ, we may not perish, but have everlasting life! (John 3:16).



**For all have sinned,
and come short of the
glory of God;**

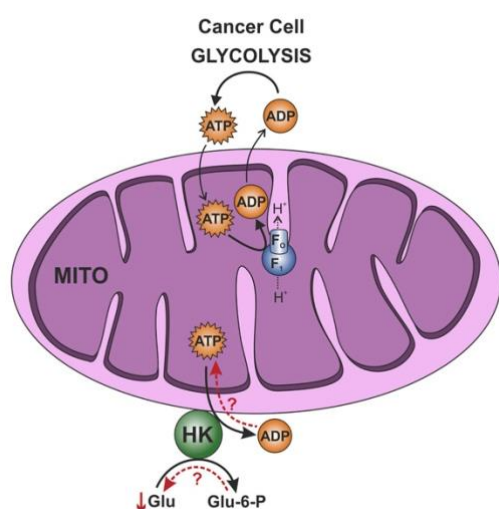
KJV Ministry
Romans 3 :23 KJV

With a correct starting point for the true nature of mankind, we can see God very differently indeed! He goes from being an anger filled God with a deeply flawed sense of justice, to a God who is rich in justice, mercy and grace! He goes from being the unfair terror of decent human souls, to the Redeemer of souls who were once

set against Him! He proved this all to be true when He came in the flesh of man, giving Himself as a full and final atoning sacrifice for your sins and mine on the Cross of Calvary! All we must do, is humble our wicked hearts, turn away from our evil desires, and call upon Him to be our Saviour, trusting that He is uniquely able as the Son of God to free us from our sins. This is the Gospel. A message from God lived by Christ Jesus, the only one who can ever claim to be a 'good person'. Indeed, the only good person to ever live, was put to death by those who believed they were 'good people'. That, in many ways, says it all.

Cellular Corruptions

The human body is a remarkable thing. The average adult body contains 30-37 **trillion** cells, with men having 36 trillion, women having 28 trillion and children having 17 trillion cells. This is not including the various types of microbes and bacterial cells within each person's body. These equate to roughly the same number (30-37 trillion) in an adult's body. The human body replaces approximately 300 billion cells a day to maintain itself (about 1% of your total cells), with over 200 different types of cells each fulfilling a different function in harmony with one another (e.g. neurons, muscle cells, red blood cells). To argue then that such a stupendously complex machine functions so well as a product of random, chance evolutionary processes, is the stuff of fantasy. If 199 of the 200 types of cells had somehow managed to 'evolve' into the highly tuned machines science reveals them to be, leaving only one type out of the 200 to be missed, say red blood cells, the end product would still be death. Human life would've never got going, as each type is needed to function in conjunction with one another for a person's life to be sustained.



Having been recently frustrated by my own physical health, and the complexity the condition I struggle with poses to medical science, I have been looking into how my ailment affects my body at a cellular level. Recent research is suggesting that patients with my condition, struggle with something called 'mitochondria'. These microscopic organelles (a minute, specialised structure inside a cell that performs a specific task/job), are often described as the battery pack or the 'powerhouse of the cell'. Their primary job is to generate chemical energy required for a cell's biochemical reactions. Mitochondria do this by converting the food we eat and oxygen into adenosine triphosphate (ATP as its otherwise known - see picture). ATP acts as a cell's main unit or currency if you will, for a cell's energy. Mitochondria is also integral in many crucial cellular functions, such as calcium storage (important for blood clotting and muscle contraction), cellular differentiation and

cell growth. Furthermore, Mitochondria act as the cellular executioner, working to destroy old, damaged, or infected cells in a process named 'programmed cell death'. Basically, mitochondria are a very important structure within a cell!

The structure of mitochondria is quite astonishing too, as it is unique in the body. Its outer membrane shields the structure whilst allowing smaller molecules to easily pass through. Then the inner membrane is intricately folded into smaller structures called *cristae*. These folds help to maximise the surface area to aid production of ATP at efficient rates. Mitochondria's inner matrix is a fluid filled space within the inner membrane. In this fluid, is stored the DNA of the mitochondria. Mitochondria are different from many other cells in that in they possess their own circular DNA. This DNA is almost uniformly passed on from the mother to the child. Considering all this, we can all agree that mitochondria is quite the structure! If Evolution got all this to happen by chance, then pigs really can fly!

In patients with my condition (M.E) it is increasingly being shown that the individual's mitochondria struggle to produce ATP efficiently. This dysfunction causes the energy crashes, cellular stress and classic 'post-exertional

fatigue/malaise' that is seen in M.E patients. In recent research, it has been discovered that M.E patients are affected by high levels of a protein known as WASF3, which heavily affects the production of mitochondrial proteins, thus further affecting normal energy production. Along with this, electron microscopes have found that M.E patients can also present with misshapen mitochondria and irregular shaping of the *cristae* (where energy is produced) of some cells. The effects of all this greatly reduces the efficiency of the M.E sufferers' mitochondria, leading to cellular inflammation, redox imbalance, and higher levels of damage to the mitochondria themselves.

Within bodies such as mine then, we have a sad witness to the truth of Holy Scripture, that all Creation is affected by the Curse, even down to the cellular level. Knowing this then, we can never underestimate the utter corrupting nature of sin and how the whole of Creation truly does groan under the weight of it! (Romans 8:22). If this were the end of the story, then it would be a truly miserable conclusion! Praise the Lord however, that it isn't! For I know, through the grace and righteousness of my Saviour Christ Jesus, this body that I dwell in, though now deeply plagued by corruption, will put on the incorruptible! (1 Corinthians 15:53) Come that happy day, this body of mine that is wrecked at the cellular level by the Curse, will be made new by the power and grace of Christ Jesus! I will have a glorified body as the Lord's own!

For many, many years, I have been frustrated with God over my body. However, looking into the realities of my condition due to my frustration, it's soberingly incredible to see how each of us is deeply affected by the Curse, both physically and spiritually. At the microscopic level, we are plagued by sin and its effects on the body. Yet through Christ Jesus, it will not last forever. It was truly a mighty blessing that God threw Adam and Eve out of Eden. For if they remained and looked to eat from the Tree of Life, and thereby become immortal, we would be locked forever in the misery of bodies plagued by the corruptions of the Fall and the Curse! One day I will be free of this suffering, and when weighed in the balance against the glory of eternity in Heaven, it really is a light burden to bear! Such is the freeing joy that faith in Christ Jesus can bring to the sick and weary of body. I hope and pray that you know this joy also. Amen.

Spiritually Lazy?

On an American talk show recently, an actor was chatting with the host about his decision to come off social media. The actor spoke about how he came to this decision after seeing a post on Instagram made by a climber from the summit of Mt Everest. The actor in question commented how he felt like he was cheating himself and being lazy in that he was able to see a view that had been hard earned by another person. He spoke on how he was able to see this startling view whilst sat in his loungewear reclined on his sofa. This juxtaposition of an amazing success being enjoyed by a person who didn't do a thing to earn it troubled him. So, he concluded that many people are lazily living their life through the lens of others. As a result, people's lives are becoming increasingly empty and lived on their behalf by a few enterprising souls.



Dwelling on this shrewd observation, I couldn't help but consider how this same point of people resting lazily on the efforts of others, can be seen within much of Christendom, particularly amongst Christian men. We live in an age where we in the developed western world, have access to an ever-increasing plethora of 'guides to Christianity'. Christian bookshops, Christian YouTube channels, church courses etc, are filled with plentiful resources that have unwittingly filled the place in our lives that should be the reserve of the Holy Scriptures.

Speaking for myself, I have stacks of books on all manner of topics related to faith, God and the Holy Bible. My bookcases creak under the weight of meaty tomes by greats like Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones, Owen, Tozer, Ryle, and many, many more. In my spiritual laziness (and proudful desire to look clever and well-read to others), I have often prioritised the insights of these great servants of God, over the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

These mighty servants of God had scaled the mountain peaks of understanding the wondrous love of God. They had spent years ascended the heights of the Word of God, and when they reached that stunning view of the revealed Lord Jesus Christ, they shared what they had seen with the world through their writings. Their purpose was to inspire other intrepid adventurers into the Word of God, encouraging others to ascend the mountain of faith, so that they might see the glorious view of Christ Jesus spread out like a lush valley for themselves.

What has transpired however, is that many are leaning on the works of these past greats too much. They read the beautiful reports of God from mighty preachers of yesteryear and are content to leave their adventures for Christ Jesus there. They are content to view the wonders of God through the view of another's efforts, just like the actor mentioned earlier. The problem with this method of experiencing a great wonder, is that it isn't reflective of the actual view enjoyed by the one who put the effort in to get to the destination. The photo taken from the summit of Mt Everest covered one small angle of the mountain top. As impressive as it was, it was still an extremely pale version of the majestic sight the man who took the photo was getting. He could look out on a stunning 360 view of the world from its highest point! Similarly, the insights recorded by the minds of faithful servants such as Wesley, Whitefield, Edwards, McCheyne, etc, give us a wonderful but still limited view of the glory of Jesus. When they wrote their words, they were surveying a far more spectacular sight of Jesus than what their words could convey in their writings. I know this frustration well, as many times I get annoyed with my inability to share with you all the wonder of Jesus that I know to be true in a full manner (not that I'm claiming to know the same level of wonders of Jesus that Wesley, Whitefield and the like knew/know!).

Yet here lies the problem, many of us are too content to enjoy the limited view given to us by others. We read their impressive insights and settle with their adventures for God, rather than embark on our own quest to scale the mountain tops of faith. Sometimes, this is due to spiritual laziness, there is no other way to dress it up. Many of we modern men are desperately weak in the spiritual leadership of our families. It is appointed that we men are to lead, teach, instruct and guide our household spiritually (1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:22-24, are just two of many verses on this important subject). To not do so is to go against God's written command. Yes, we may be busy with a hundred and one things to do in any given day. Yes, we may be tired from our various tasks, jobs, work, duties and the like. But the fact of the matter is that we are instructed by God to climb that mountain of faith for our family, so that we can see the truly wondrous and full view of Christ Jesus for ourselves. Then, our lives will be so animated by our communion with God on that high mountaintop of faith, that our lives will be a visible witness, a real testament to the wonders that comes from a life lived in communion with Christ Jesus! We shall descend the mountain top of personal, experienced faith like Moses did from Mt Sinai, with eyes ablaze for Christ, and a gentle smile marking the peace of God that dwells in our hearts. It will be the joy of our faith, not just the strained effort of our faith that will declare boldly that the love of God is real and available to all who seek Him.

It isn't enough to quote the experiences of others lazily, even the greats of the faith, and expect others to accept what has been told them. This is especially true when they look at us and how we live our lives, and they see a life lived very differently from what we are preaching. We men of faith are to not rest on the spiritual labours of others, but we are to actively engage in that same noble pursuit of Christ, as those who came before us. We are to read the reports of Christ Jesus from those that have gone before, and be stirred up by them to see the glories of Christ Jesus for ourselves! This is the manner of God, for at the empty tomb of Jesus, the angels invited the women that blessed Easter morning, to see for themselves the triumph of Christ over death!

I will conclude with a word from the Scriptures on how we men are to not be spiritually lazy. For in 1 Corinthians 16:13 we read, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." We cannot follow this command if we are waiting for someone else to do our duty, whoever that may be. We are not to leave such a precious position to someone else's care. We have been entrusted with it by God, and He calls to each of us to seek after Him daily so that we are enabled by His grace, to lead our household with a real, reasoned and living faith.

Dangerous Errors Of Origen



Origen (184-254 AD) is held in the highest esteem by the vast majority of Christendom. Yet is such lofty praise appropriately given to this man? What were his views, ambitions, and thoughts on the Word of God? To begin to answer this question, let's look at some of the words of Origen himself.

In Origen's famous work, *De Principis (On First Principles)*, he wrote "The Word of God" placed "certain stumbling blocks" and "impossibilities" into the Holy Bible. Part of Origen's incorrect thinking was that Jesus added "mystical senses" to historical events and hid "deeper meaning" from common people. In conclusion to this deeply incorrect assessment of the Bible, Origen formulated the teaching that the average person wasn't worthy or capable of accessing the secret, mystical meanings of the Scriptures.

More worryingly, Origen said that the Bible contained stories and events that "did not take place, sometimes what could not have happened; sometimes what could, but did not." This is quite the statement from a man heralded as one of the great minds/voices of Christianity! It would appear from the very words of Origen, that he held the view that the Bible contained outright lies and fabrications! This is hardly the stand of someone heralded as a hero of the Christian faith!

What makes all this worse (yes, it gets worse), Origen also argued that the Holy Spirit placed in the Gospels and Epistles events that seem as if they happened "but which did not actually occur." He doubled down on this ghastly statement by asserting that "those who are not altogether blind can collect countless instances" of situations/events "recorded as having occurred, but which did not literally take place". Origen is openly going against the Word of God by essentially contending that the Holy Spirit has at best embellished the truth, and at worst outright deceived Christians for generations. These are the actual views of Origen. Eye opening indeed!

As we can see from the words of Origen himself, any true bible believer is to view Origen's work with the keenest sense of suspicion. Origen's personal views heavily influenced his work on the compilation of what we know today as the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament. This manuscript has drawn significant scepticism for its reliability and yet it is being increasingly marketed as the 'oldest and best' manuscript of the Old Testament text (see David W. Daniels excellent book *Did Jesus Use The Septuagint* for more information). This is the text used by as the base of the Catholic Bible, meaning that step by step, each new Bible version that uses the Alexandrian Text (Septuagint, Sinaiticus, Vaticanus) as its base, is becoming indistinguishable from the Catholic Bible. The Catholic Bible recognises the Apocrypha as canon, thus allowing itself to teach purgatory, limbo and other false Catholic teachings as doctrine.

As you can see, this seemingly trivial matter of Biblical manuscripts/texts and their origins does indeed have a massive impact on the doctrinal stand of the Christian faith. Sadly, men such as Origen have been incorrectly labelled as greats of Christianity, when actually he was a clear Bible sceptic. Before we blindly follow the teachings of any man, no matter how great the reputation, we are to apply Biblical wisdom and look at their fruits. The fruits of Origen's work are a deeply sceptical view upon the Word of God that holds huge implications upon the faith of many to this day. So, we are to judge all things by the Word of God, this is our God given shield against deception and falsehood, whether this be unwitting deception or deliberate. There is too much at stake (the souls of people) to be anything less than vigilant and steadfast on such matters.

Jesus Christ Our Saviour

As Islam becomes an ever-louder voice in the land, Christians are being challenged on increasing number of occasions by Muslims, as to how Jesus 'never claimed to be God'. If this were true, then Christianity has been

dealt a deathblow, as our entire faith, our entire salvation, our eternal destiny, is built upon the truth that Jesus is God, and therefore is able to be our Saviour.

Firstly, let's look at this oft-repeated claim by Muslim apologists, that Jesus never claimed to be God. Well, that simply isn't correct. The seven great 'I AM' statements made by Jesus, were all clear claims to divinity, and the people who heard Jesus make these statements clearly understood them as claims of divinity. For instance, when Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58) the Pharisees were outraged and picked up stones ready to stone Jesus to death. This was because they recognised that Jesus was claiming to be the God who spoke to Moses through the burning bush, revealing Himself as 'I AM'. Such a claim was one of divinity, a claim wrongly deemed in this instance as blasphemy, and therefore punishable by death.

Furthermore, the Pharisees were outraged by Jesus statement that "Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." Abraham is the father of the faith, he who was deemed righteous before God because he believed Him and His promises. That promise was established on the authority of God Himself, and thus when Jesus said the Abraham rejoiced to see His day, Jesus was stating that Abraham's hope in God was fulfilled in Jesus, as He is God. This clear claim to be God Incarnate, was the reason why the Pharisees were so incensed and outraged, as they sought to punish Him for what they wrongly deemed as blasphemy.



Next, some Muslim apologists will argue that Jesus referring to Himself as the "Son of man" is an acknowledgement by Him, that He is a mere man and not God Incarnate. This is simply a misunderstanding of the Biblical text, as the title 'Son of man' is exactly that, a title, not a self-deprecating statement. When Jesus answered the question put to Him by the High Priest during His mock trial, as to whether He is the "Son of the Blessed?" (Mark 14:61), He replied "I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven." (Mark 14:62). These words enraged the High Priest, who tore his clothes in anger at the clear claim to be God, made by Jesus. This was because the High Priest understood that Jesus was quoting Daniel 7:13, directly asserting that He is the Son of man, a title denoting the power and authority of God. The 'Son of man' therefore reflects deity, not mere mortality as many Muslims wrongly assert.

The title 'Son of man' wonderfully displays the unique coming together of God and man in the Lord Jesus Christ. For Jesus must be God for His shed blood to be a perfect atoning sacrifice for our sins. Our sins are an eternal crime because they are made against an eternal God, and thus it must be an equal payment to cover the debt. This debt of sin, Christ fully paid on the Cross for you and me. Yet, He must be human too, so that His sacrifice would be a substitutionary one for the sins we humans have incurred against God. Again, the payment needs to fit the debt. Jesus uniquely fills this role as the Son of man, thereby making Him our Saviour.

This unique and blessed role of Jesus as our Saviour, is further underlined in Titus 3:4 and 3:6. In Titus 3:4, we read the words "God our Saviour", words that are synonymous with those in verse 6, "Jesus Christ our Saviour." The title 'Saviour' comes from the Greek word *soter* (where we get the term 'soteriology' or the study of salvation). This title appears 24 times in the New Testament (12+12 symbolising 'completeness upon completeness' = completeness of God + completeness of grace = our salvation), 8 of those being synonymous with Jesus Christ. The first of these is seen in Mary's 'Magnificat' as recorded in Luke 1:47. Here, the first usage of 'Saviour' as synonymous with Jesus, is given when it is revealed to Mary by the angel Gabriel, that she is carrying the Saviour of the World. This further underlines the mission of this child that was Jesus, to be the Saviour of the world, and thus the only one capable of performing such a feat! Indeed, it is a statement that proves that Jesus was always God and didn't just have the 'Christ Spirit' descend upon Him at His baptism, as some wrongly believe.

As Scripture has consistently revealed to us all, Jesus Christ **is** God, was always God and will always be God. Anything less than a strong stand on this truth will see a swift crumbling of the very foundation of the Christian faith. This is where we, as believers, need to school ourselves in the Biblical text, so that we can show the sceptics where the proofs to our faith rests. It isn't enough to believe 'just because', as such a weak base for faith will soon be exposed, harming our own faith in Christ Jesus, and likely causing the sceptic to feel validated. Our lack of desire to study the Scriptures and know its truth will have great consequences, both to our own life and indeed the lives of others.

1 Peter 3:25 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready to always give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.

Refusal To Be Weak

In the chaos of the modern world, with all its dangers, toils and snares, many are returning to the 'wisdom' of the ancients to make sense of it all. One such source of worldly wisdom is Stoicism. Stoicism is a school of thought/philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium, in Athens approximately 300 BC. Stoicism looks to build personal resilience, fortitude, acceptance of things we cannot control, and seeking of virtues such as wisdom, courage, justice and temperance.

Zeno took great inspiration from Socrates (the man who was made to kill himself by poison for corrupting the Athenian youth with his teachings), ultimately basing his foundation of knowledge upon the assertion that wisdom is the ultimate good. Zeno also took inspiration from his teacher Crates of Thebes, a prominent Cynic. The Cynics taught the importance of Asceticism, a lifestyle of strict self-discipline and refusal to indulge in any worldly, physical or material pleasure. They believed such intense self-discipline could lead a person to a higher state of consciousness, purifying the soul and thus become close to the divine. Such teaching is found deep within the practices of Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism and increasingly modern 'Christianity'.

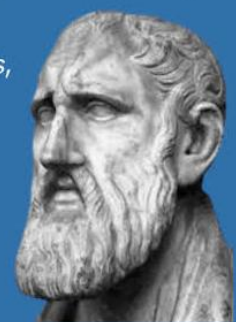
The teachings of Stoicism saw significant uptake by the Roman world, and soon became the practical guide to life for all levels of society, from slaves through to emperors. Prominent Roman Stoics include such luminaries as Epictetus, Seneca and Emperor Marcus Aurelius. It gave every level of society in the pagan Roman world, a way to cope with the often violent and chaotic world in which they dwelt. It appealed to mankind's desire to master itself and become its own saviour, thus giving itself hope in what often seems to be a hopeless existence. As the modern world begins to resemble the violence of this ancient era, we are again seeing increasing numbers turn to stoicism as a means of finding peace.

So why do I raise this issue? Well, because stoicism is beginning to find its way into Biblical Christianity, slowly corrupting the purity of the Gospel itself. We only need look at one popular modern prayer that adorns many a home, whether it be on a mug, a keyring, a fridge magnet, etc. That being the popular 'Serenity Prayer'. For a long time, this prayer has never sat right with me when I have looked at it in local Christian bookstores. It reads:

'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.'

"The purpose of life is happiness, which is achieved by virtue, living according to the dictates of reason, ethical and philosophical training, self-reflection, careful judgements, and inner calm."

Zeno of Citium
Founder of Stoicism



Do you see any issue here? Many wouldn't, yet here is why having a well-rounded knowledge is a wonderful additional warning against potentially serious error. The Serenity Prayer asks that God grant three of the highest desires of the Stoic life, that being serenity, courage and wisdom, with wisdom being the greatest goal, in that it enables the previous two goals of serenity and courage. The Serenity Prayer asks that we 'accept the things we cannot change', this is one of the fundamental teachings of Stoicism. One that doesn't obviously go against any Biblical grain of truth. Yet when we properly dwell on this request, it can be read as a statement of disbelief in the power and authority of God over everything. We are told to believe that all things are possible with God (Matthew 19:26), and that with faith, even as small as a mustard seed, a believer can move mountains (Matthew 17:20). Scripture tells us not to accept and cower over the limitations in front of us, those that hinder our service and relationship with God, but that we are to have faith in His power and authority over everything!

This is the peace that we can have in our faith, that nothing is impossible for our God! The Serenity Prayer actually weakens this source of spiritual strength, as it quietly shifts the focus of our faith away from God and towards ourselves. We can see this by the language used in the prayer, it contains 'me' and 'I' as its focus of action and result. This is stoicism in action, not the Gospel. The Gospel is not about us, but about Jesus. It isn't about 'me' it's about 'Him', as the Scottish preacher Alistair Begg notes. Praise the Lord that it is all about Him, for if it was about me, I would fail time and time again! My peace and assurance of salvation would be on rocky ground every day if it was based on me and not Jesus.

This is where an awareness of our weakness is not a bad thing. It is a good thing! Stoicism looks to eradicate weakness through self-mastery, discipline, embracing of nature and virtues that can be attained by the self. In short, it promotes self-fulfilment and self-redemption. It looks to strangle the awareness of our mortal weakness, that weakness which the Holy Spirit uses to convict us of our sins, and thus lead us to salvation in the strength and grace of Christ Jesus. It is this weakness that God looks to use to open our eyes, so that we become truly aware of our desperate state before Him. This then drives us to prayer, just as the American preacher Paul Washer observed when he said, "The problem isn't that we're weak, it's that we don't know how weak we are. That awareness of how weak we are would drive us to prayer." Many of the Psalms contain words spoken in awareness of our mortal weakness, and an appeal to God for His mercy and grace to deliver the psalmist from his miserable condition (Psalm 6:2, Psalm 73:26, Psalm 61:2).

Stoicism destroys this awareness by calling weakness bad ("Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil" Isaiah 5:20). It looks to eliminate weakness through self-discipline, seeking of wisdom and an embracing of nature. None of these things are bad, when they are done in the pursuit of God and His glorification. They become corrupted in their usefulness however, when they are used as a goal for self-actualisation, self-fulfilment or glorification of the self. It's a subtle difference that can have enormous ramifications on a life. This is where the forces of spiritual darkness lurk, in the seemingly minor and trivial deviations from the original truth.

Some of you may be thinking that such assertions are 'over the top'. Possibly so. Let's consider how the embracing of stoicism in Christianity would impact a life of faith. The 'stoic Christian' looks to gain self-mastery through strict self-discipline; mastery of emotions; the acceptance of limitations of power; the pursuit of wisdom; resilience, and the celebration of nature. The initial goal of all this is to honour God, a noble enterprise. After some time, the 'stoic Christian' seemingly becomes more emotionally stable, more resilient in their manner. Yet is it a stability based on submission to God's will, or a turning off of emotions? They seemingly become more peaceful, thanks to their increased appreciation of nature. Yet is it an appreciation of the wonder of God's creative power, or for the beauty of the Creation itself? They appear to become wiser in their ways. Yet is it a Biblical wisdom they are grounding themselves in, or the wisdom of men? They appear more in tune with 'God', as they grow increasingly spiritual. Yet is this because of becoming more in tune with the God of the Bible, or the 'universe'. The Stoic 'way' dictates that it must be because of the latter reasons for each category, as stoicism teaches the existence of a divine, rational force which holds benevolent providence towards all life. This is nearly identical to what all New Age teaching dictates. A life lived 'stoically', whether under Christian motivations or not, can lead that life into a potentially dangerous world of pantheism.

Stoicism appears to offer some decent teachings on initial study. Therein lies the problem. The Devil is a master at leaving just enough truth to make his claims believable and seemingly safe. Yes, we are to not be

enslaved to our emotions as Christians, but instead live in **temperance** (1 Corinthians 9:25). But this is to glorify God as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), proving our regeneration in Christ Jesus. Yes, we are to be resilient or **steadfast** (1 Corinthians 15:58), but not in our own strength or endurance, but “abounding in the work of the Lord”. Yes, we are to seek after wisdom (Proverbs 4:7, James 1:5), but this is the wisdom held in Christ Jesus, a personal God, not a ‘divine force’. We are not to seek after the wisdom of faceless ‘forces’, or the wisdom of men (1 Corinthians 1:22). Yes, we are to be thankful and enjoy God’s amazing Creation, but never to worship the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25).

Do you see how the Devil craftily looks to pervert the Word of God, by taking its truth and carefully reorientating its focus from Christ Jesus to ourselves. He wants us to exalt ourselves and not Jesus Christ, for this is what he looks to do himself! Satan will take great pleasure in conning us into doing so, even when we think we’re serving Jesus.

The world is an increasingly dangerous and uncertain place, and the temptation to ‘lock down’ and adopt Stoic philosophies can be very tempting. But do not go down this road, no matter how ‘safe’ it seems. The truth is that yes, everything in this world is getting worse. Evil is spreading rapidly, but we cannot protect ourselves from it all by our strength, by our wisdom, by our understanding. We can, however, have peace, knowing that we are watched over by an Almighty God. One who will return in all power and glory in coming days, and He will crush all evil under His glorious and peaceful reign from the throne of David. We are to guard this peace through careful study and application of His Pure Word.

Stoicism looks to give hope in the unity of man’s strength and wisdom, all with the power of the ‘universe’ as its fuel. The Holy Bible looks to give us hope even in our weakness, that all will be made new by the power of a loving, personal Saviour, that being the Lord Jesus Christ. So do not look to choke down your weakness. Instead, take it to the Lord, and rest in Him, being still and knowing that He is God (Psalm 46:10). He will give you, His peace. He will give you His strength to endure. He will give you, His joy. And He will set your eyes on His imminent return. Amen.

Be Not Afraid

Every life is affected by fear. Even the most self-assured person battles secret strains of fear. Fear first fell upon mankind in Eden, when Adam sinned by eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Having eaten of its forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness, prompting shame to flood them, driving them into hiding from the presence of God. Just moments before, Adam and Eve had known the glory of pure communion with the Lord. Yet in the Fall, fear told them to hide from the God that had lovingly given them everything in fullness of perfection. There was no reason to fear God in that awful sense of terror and dread; yet sin had corrupted their understanding of Him and had deceived them into becoming fearful of their Creator.

And so, every life recorded in history has been affected by fear, often becoming the seed of great sins. Cain slew Abel, because he was jealous of Abel. Yet perhaps this was partly driven by a deep fear of being rejected by God, fuelling his disbelief that God would accept him if he simply did as Abel (Genesis 4:7), leading him into a murderous hatred of his brother. Such a scene has been repeated throughout history, amongst every family. Sibling rivalry for the affections of the parent/s, builds anger, jealousy and resentment between the siblings. Whilst some parents can manipulate this rivalry for selfish purposes, our Heavenly Father is not as we are in our fallen ways. For God came to Cain and looked to assure him, that if Cain simply did as instructed, he would be received just as lovingly as his brother Abel had been. Yet fear had ensnared Cain’s heart too deeply, hardening it against the tender Word of God. Fear often does this; it stiffens the heart and locks it away against gentle words of assurance of affection. When a heart is so hardened, anger becomes its foundation of existence, and soon sin will overcome that life.

Abraham, the father of all that believe (Romans 4:16-17), fell into the same sin twice, out of fear. He lied about Sarah being his wife, twice telling foreign rulers that Sarah was his sister, all because he was fearful for his

life. If such a man of mighty faith as Abraham could succumb to fear so greatly, then who are we to pretend that we are not also so affected by its poisonous grip! Jacob was fearful to the point of deceiving his own family. Jacob's sons were fearful of their father's preference for Joseph, leading them to sin. Moses was fearful of his own people. Saul was also fearful of the people. David ordered the death of Uzziah out of fear, after having made Uzziah's wife pregnant in an affair. Jonah was fearful of the call of God to preach to the wicked Ninevites. Indeed, you will struggle to find a person in the Bible that was not fearful at some point, and that fear often led them into sin.

Fear can grip a life in many ways. It can turn family members against each other needlessly (a common scene in the Bible and in our own lives). It can cause a life filled with potential to hide away in undetermined fear of 'what could be'. It can silence a revelation of good and true love, for fear of rejection. It can drive a person to act rashly towards someone they love, simply out of a fear of losing them. It can cause a person to push others away simply out of a fear of being hurt. This often causes them to again, needlessly lose the person they were desperate to hold onto. I have seen such things happen again and again. I am guilty of them myself. I sit here writing this, with a heaviness of heart, knowing how much has been sacrificed to fear. Fear is a cruel master. It demands the surrender of everything you are, and it gives nothing in return.

Yet into this hopeless scene, our Saviour emerges from the mists of eternity, taking on the frailties of the flesh of man, so that He may know them for Himself (Psalm 103:14, Hebrews 4:15). He saw fear descend upon Adam, corrupting a once pure and loving bond between God and mankind. And so, He took pity upon our self-inflicted condition, coming to our aid when we could not aid ourselves. He came to restore what Adam lost, so that we need not be enslaved to fear, but instead be delivered from its cold clutches. This He did according to the eternal plan of salvation of believing mankind, as revealed in His Word, where it says in Hebrews 2:10-11:

For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.

Read those words again. This is the sound of Heaven, the voice of God being revealed to you directly, so that you need never live in fear! See how it was good in the sight of the Almighty, eternal God, that Christ Jesus came to suffer in the flesh of man, so that His perfect sacrifice might atone for our sins. In His divine power as the Son of God, Jesus, having conquered sin and death in His triumphant Resurrection, sanctifies and sets aside for glory through His own righteousness, all those who believe on Him! His own Word declares that as a result of His power, His authority, His grace, His mercy, His love, **He is not ashamed of us!** Oh, how I could read those words again and again! To think that maybe family are ashamed of me; but Jesus isn't! Friends may be ashamed of me; but Jesus isn't! All the world may reject me; but Jesus hasn't! All those things that declare they are ashamed of me, shall pass away. But He who is eternal, and whose Word shall never pass away, is not ashamed of me. This is the glorious banner of truth, of assurance of salvation in which every redeemed heart in Christ Jesus can rest.

In this great covering of God's love, as given through the blood of Christ Jesus, all we who love and follow the Lord Jesus, have a means by which to shatter the chains of fear on our lives! When we see, when we trust what He has written, that He who has made all things, by Him, through Him, for Him (Colossians 1:16), is not ashamed to call us His brethren, what is there that we are justified to be fearful of?! So what if we lose out in this life for the name of Jesus Christ and the Gospel! He has made us His brethren through nothing but His own power and love! That is grace personified! As Spurgeon so passionately preached, if Jesus, the heir of all power and glory, were to give but a tiny crumb of goodness from the heavenly table of God's provision to we repentant sinners, that would render Him great in goodness and mercy! Yet, He did not rest in His labours (Hebrews 1:3) until He had secured a full sharing of His divine inheritance for each of us! He has not set aside crumbs of mercy and provision for us, but an abundance of it! Just look at the enormity of leftovers from the loaves and fishes' miracle as a testament to this truth! (Matthew 14:14-21). There is nothing more spectacular in all existence than the grace of Christ Jesus, as it never fails to satisfy those who hunger for His goodness! His grace is truly sufficient.

This then is the cure to fear! To trust, to revel in, to delight in, to adore the Lord Jesus Christ! To not put hope in our feeble clinging to His robe of righteousness, but as again Spurgeon said, to hope in certainty on He who **is** righteousness! We may stumble and fail, but He has not, He will not, He cannot! Jesus is the Son of God, full of power, authority, justice, mercy, grace and love. But wait, He isn't full of these wondrous attributes, He is the source of them! When we see the magnitude of God as revealed in Christ Jesus, we have a God who swallows up all traces of fear, for nothing can defy Him!



So, this is the gift of Jesus' words when He said that we are not worthy of Him, if we are not willing to 'hate' those we love most for His name's sake (Luke 14:26). When read correctly, this challenging verse does not speak of a petty, jealous God; but a gracious, loving one. For when Jesus said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life, he cannot be my disciple." Jesus was saying that if we are not prepared to love those who we hold dear lower than He in our hearts, then we are not worthy of Him. That is because to lift such people above Christ, is to live in bondage to fear, for we will change our behaviours, our hopes, our dreams, our service to Him, so that our earthly relationships are unaffected by our faith. In essence, we are saying with our deeds, that we are ashamed of Jesus. Consider this deeply in light of Hebrews 2:11. He is not ashamed to call us His brethren, even considering what we are! Yet so often we are ashamed of Him, especially when it might come at the cost of those we hold deeper in our affections. Any love that is subject to fear, is not worthy to be truly called love in all its wondrous depths.

Christ will not share our affections with anything tainted by fear, for fear is the consequence of sin, and if sin be accepted into the fold of God, even in a fraction of existence, God's purity is compromised. This would go against the pure nature of God, and God cannot act against Himself. And so true love, perfect love, **must** cast out fear to be real (1 John 4:18). The perfection of the love of God is the greatest thing in all existence, and He desires that we know it for ourselves and delight in it daily.

Yet for we frail and weak beings of the flesh to do so, for us to truly delight in perfection of love, fear must be cast out with the refining fire of God's will. This is a hard process, as the Apostle Peter knew well. It was beside a fire, that he denied his Lord and Master three times. Yet it was by a fire (the breakfast on the beach), where the love of God made sense to Him at last. Peter had to suffer, just as Christ suffered, to see that there is nothing greater than the love of God. Hardships and sorrows may take people from us; it may take health from us; it may take money from us; yet it cannot take the grace of Christ Jesus from us! This is why His grace is sufficient, just as the Apostle Paul learnt (2 Corinthians 12:9). We are called to learn it also, all so that the love of God may be made perfect in us. Then fear dies, and love lives! But not some ethereal, faceless love, but a real, substantial love that can be quantified and known personally in the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ! For to live truly, is to live in Christ (Galatians 2:20), the captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10). He who is not ashamed to call us His brethren. Dwell on those words, and treasure them all to way to the day you embrace Him in Heaven. I for one shall collapse into His arms and let all pain of shame be removed from me forever. Then I and all those who believe also, shall know an existence sweeter than even Adam did in Eden. For we shall know God in all His attributes; not a from distance, but from within a bond held in glorified hearts to the praise of God forever. Amen.

Dangers Of Skim Reading

We've all done it, skim read something important, only to be exposed later on through some error of judgement, all because we didn't read the information carefully. Skim reading the Bible is a common and dangerous practice to engage in. Hurriedly reading through a devotion or a passage of Scripture may tick

chores of faith off the list, but it can lead to a faith built on misconceptions. These misconceptions can then be critiqued by sceptics later on, leaving us floundering for an answer that we would've known had we studied the Scriptures with proper reverence and patience.

When we consider the creation of Adam, we often have a child-friendly image of Adam emerging from the ground surrounded by the lush Garden of Eden. The countless children's books on Creation reinforce this idea into the minds of parents and children alike; yet is this image Biblically correct? And if it's not, does it hold any potential effects on the strength of our faith?

In Genesis 2:7-8, we read these words:

And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

God forms Adam from the dust of the ground and breathed life into Adam's nostrils, thus Adam "became a living soul." This implies that Adam was at this immediate point of Creation, fully aware of himself, a mature adult, having received consciousness from the Lord God directly. It is **after** this that God plants the Garden of Eden. What are the implications of this? That Adam was not made for Eden; Eden was made for Adam. In other words, Adam was not to be a slave unto the keeping of Eden, because the task had been made before the worker. Instead, Adam was to explore, utilise and develop Eden, so as to engage all the capacities and abilities God had given him, for his enjoyment and enrichment. By doing this, Adam's work would effortlessly reflect the capacities and abilities of the God in who's image and likeness in which he had been made. This would then heighten Adam's understanding of God through his work, cultivating an ever-deepening relationship with God. This would be done in God's trusting gifting of his Creation unto Adam for its care and upkeep. Whilst Adam would honour this trusting gift given to him by God, through the happy stewardship of Creation.

God intended work to be fulfilling, exciting, adventurous and invigorating, all given to us as a visible gift from Him. The Scriptural text tells us that Adam was likely conscious and alert, watching God at work when he saw God plant Eden for his dwelling place. Adam probably didn't just wake up to life surrounded by the paradise that was Eden. Instead, he could well have watched God's provision in action, as he stood and watched God provide a wonderful home for him.

If this is the case, which the text suggests, then as Dr MAdam's rebellion against God becomes all the more heinous! For Adam had seen with his own eyes, how God had given not only a perfect world, filled with

abundance of life everywhere; but that God also provided a home for Adam fully out of His loving provision. Adam had no part in creating his dwelling place that was Eden, it was all a gift of God. A gift that he would turn away from on the allure of a lie. Adam knew what he was doing when he sinned against God. He had seen for himself how God had kept no good thing from him (Psalm 84:11), and yet Adam believed Satan's lie over the evidence of God's love, when Satan said that God was keeping something good from him (Genesis 3:4-6). Adam disbelieved God and the abundance of evidence



God had provided him, that proved God was trustworthy and good. So, disbelieving God, brought in death to the world, as it is a sin for disbelief calls God a liar. This same crime we each commit, when we disregard the evidence all around us of God's loving provision. Thus, we are guilty before God just as Adam was.

So, Eden was to be Adam's home, a wonderful gift of God. The upkeep of that home was not to be a boring, laborious, unending series of chores like we know 'upkeep' today. It was to be an exciting utilising of time, space and matter, through our God given skills and abilities, so that we could thrive and live fulfilled lives.

Lives that rest in thanksgiving unto the plentiful provision of God. Eden was to be a 'base' as Dr Henry Morris noted, for Adam and Eve to go and explore the world and subdue it. This was not to abuse Creation, but to use the capacities and abilities God had given man, to develop an existence where all Creation could thrive through man's God given ingenuity! All the while this adventure filled life rested upon the surety of a paradise of a home that Adam and Eve could come back to, to rest and commune with God. It would all reflect the model of the days of Creation itself, as the work of mankind would glorify Him through the God ordained structure of the week. It was all such a full and perfect structure of existence, one that Adam had seen for himself, and so was without excuse when he turned away from its richness of glory.

To think on these things then, we cannot be helped but find ourselves marvelling at the mercy of God, when He readied a path to the redemption of repentant sinners through His own Son, Jesus Christ! The scale of Adam's rebellion was truly immense, and so it would take someone who was greater still to overcome it! That could only be God Himself!

The readiness of this grace filled redemption of repentant sinners that is the Gospel, is already visible in the very words of Genesis 2:8. For God "put the man whom he had formed" in the paradise of Eden. Adam did not enter on his own strength; God put him there. So it is that all those who reside in Paradise today, like the thief on the cross next to Jesus, were put there by God's strength alone. What a picture of the Gospel we are given in the very Creation account! How else could it be but so? For Jesus is the Lamb slain before the foundations of the world (Revelation 13:8). Isn't it amazing, how the last book of the Bible and all its events (The Book of Revelation), were readied before the events of the first book was even commenced! Jesus truly is the Alpha and Omega! (Revelation 1:8). How wonderful it is to have a God that is never caught out by any event, He is always in command and ready to ensure His perfect will be done.

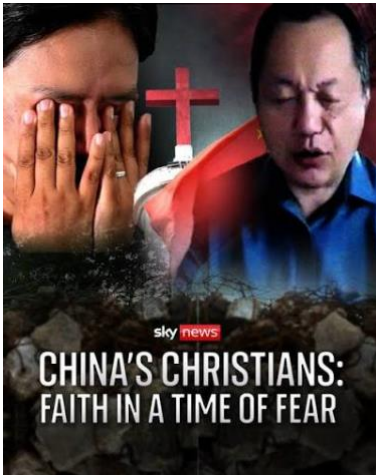
Finally, note the position of the garden in Eden, in how it was placed eastwards. This is often seen in the Scriptures as symbol of both affliction, judgment and alienation from God (Expulsion from Eden, expulsion of Cain, the Tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, Babylonian captivity, plagues of Egypt). This foreshadowed the Fall of mankind through Adam, further highlighted the foreknowledge of God. For God knew that mankind would rebel against His wondrous love, and so would choose to be alienated from God, thus drawing God's just wrath.

Yet we also see in the Scriptures, movements of people coming from the East in search of God (the Magi coming to see the new-born Christ Jesus; the Temple accessed from the East Gate). They move back towards the God because He draws them to Him (how the star led the Magi to Jesus), stirring up their longing for peace and assurance of eternal life. The placing of the garden in Eden eastwards was also a deliberate foreshadowing from God of the events of time itself. For all history is built upon the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with its focus on the events of the Cross and the Empty Tomb. Adam did not know all these wondrous intricacies of God's redemptive plan when he walked in Eden. Yet they were there, planted in the rich soil that was Eden, witnessed in the Tree of Life. For mankind cannot access eternal life by himself; he must be led there by the grace of God. This He will do for all who believe on His Son the Lord Jesus Christ and seek His forgiveness for their sins. Then one day known unto God, we will step foot in a Paradise filled with great wonders; and the Tree of Life will be there too, just as it was in Eden.

So, we are to resist the urge to skim read the Word of God. We are to delve into its richness of truth with a sense of wonder, excitement, patience and adventure, asking the Holy Spirit to teach us of its eternal wonders! In doing so, we can reap its rich rewards that are a life fulfilled in Christ Jesus. A life that will not end when we close our eyes for the last time in this life. But one that will explode into an ever-greater realm of wonders and glories when we step into eternity! All through the grace and righteousness of Christ Jesus, the Alpha and Omega. Amen.

Persecution In China

A recent Sky News feature investigated the growing persecution of Christianity in China. The communist government in China has long persecuted the Church, yet within the last few years, this persecution has rapidly escalated across the nation. Numerous pastors have been arrested in the middle of the night and taken to prison, leaving their families in despair as they are left with no clue as to the welfare of their husband/father/brother/friend.



Unlicensed, 'underground' churches have taken the greatest hit in recent years, with police raids violently entering church services, whisking away elders and closing church doors in a matter of moments. Anyone who speaks out against the persecution soon disappears as they are taken away by Chinese State officials. The Sky News reporter who went to visit some of the now closed church sites, was often hounded out of the town she was visiting by officials who were keen to not allow any recording on the matter to take place. Indeed, every time she entered a new town/region, within minutes both herself and her news crew would be tailed by Chinese officials, who somehow knew their every move within the country.

Those ever lessening in number licensed by the State churches, are carefully watched by the authorities, with State officials often attending services to ensure nothing is said against the government. Those brave pastors and/or elders that do speak out, find themselves swept away in the dead of night by masked government officials. When the Sky News reporter went to visit one of these state approved churches, within a couple of minutes, local officials entered to ensure that nothing was said against the Chinese government. The pastors and elders of these approved churches were clearly worried each time, and so the reporter was hurried out of the building on every occasion.

Numerous church buildings have been completely destroyed across the country, with the land that once housed the church buildings zoned off so that no one can video/visit the area. On one visit to town where a once popular church had been razed to the ground, locals didn't want to even acknowledge to the reporter that a church ever existed in the now empty plot, such was the fear of what might happen to them if they talked about the situation.

The faithful believers who remain are often having to resort to online services whilst they hide away in their homes. Many don't turn the cameras on their computers on so that they cannot be identified, and yet even this level of remote fellowship is beginning to be targeted by state officials. Compounding this attempted erasing of Biblical Christianity, is the governments moves to produce an officially state backed 'bible' that is written to favour communist agendas and severely weaken key doctrines of the Christian faith.

We are to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ in China, they are experiencing great levels of persecution for simply following our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. We must also stand guard ready for such persecution to reach these shores, where we currently are blessed to be able to attend church in peace and safety. Such terrors were commonplace in this land not even that long ago, as simple believers in Christ were forced to flee these shores for a life free of persecution in the New World of the Americas.

Even with this history to warn of us the ever-present threat of persecution, the voice of western Christendom fades a little more each passing year. As a result, the enemies of God's Word grow a little stronger, a little braver in the attempt to squash the witness of Christ Jesus and the Gospel we bear. So as nations such ours drift ever more into left leaning, often anti-Christian political stances, we are to contend for the faith with steadfastness, whether this be in the pulpit, the classroom, the workplace, or even the home. We are to do so trusting that the Lord will give us the words to speak in defence of the Gospel, whilst giving us the peace to know that the battle is the Lord's (1 Samuel 17:47).

All that being said, we will not end this piece in worry for the future. We shall end it in the amazing and joyful news that even in the face of such widespread and often violent persecution, the Lord is using it as a refining fire to stir up many to come to true faith in Him. The numbers of converts to Christ in China, continues to grow with each passing month, terrifying those forces of darkness that are attempting to snuff out the light of Christ Jesus and the Gospel. This will never be done, for the gates of Hell shall not prevail against the Church of Christ Jesus (Matthew 16:18)! Praise the Lord that though the battle is fierce and hard fought, the victory is certain, for it has already been gained by Him at the Cross and empty tomb. Amen.

The Magnitude Of Divine Foreknowledge

There's a scene in a recent sci-fi movie, where the main character returns to a space station having been stuck on a distant planet. The idea of the scene is that due to the gravitational pull of a nearby black hole, time passes at a very different rate to those orbiting the planet in the space station, as opposed to what he experienced whilst on the distant planet. The main character spends only a few hours on the planet in question, but by the time he returns to the space station, over 23 years of 'earth time' has passed for those who remained on the space station.

On his return to the space station, the main character goes to his cabin to watch 23 years of video messages sent by his children back on Earth. They haven't heard anything from him for years and are presuming him dead. Yet there he sits, very much alive, going through 23 years of video messages. The scene is emotionally intense, as the main character watches his children grow up, get married, have children, lose his own father/their grandfather, learn his grandchild has also died, and watch his son say goodbye to him presuming him to be dead. All this with his now much older daughter still carrying anger towards him for going on this interstellar trip, leaving her without her Dad at a vulnerable age.

Watching this scene, and how the main character struggles to process all the depth of emotions that come from an unrelenting barrage of life's highs and lows, my mind wrestled with something even bigger. I couldn't fathom how God, in His foreknowledge, could know and indeed feel all the sufferings and sorrows of all humanity throughout all time, and not be broken by it all! We know that God's heart weeps at death and suffering, just look at Christ's response to the death of Lazarus when He goes to Lazarus' tomb (John 11:35) So to know all the intimate details of every last persons suffering and death, all at the same time (God is eternal and not bound by gradual revelations of events as we are), and not be overwhelmed by it all, tells us exactly how powerful and enduring He is! Not only was He not overwhelmed by all this foreknowledge, He was wise, temperate and powerful enough to craft and fulfil a plan of salvation towards those who rebelled against His wondrous, selfless love! When we stop and consider such immensities of truth, we see afresh just how monumental our God truly is! When we do so, we see how heinous our sin against Him is, yet how magnificent His grace towards we repentant sinners is also! It takes the truth and beauty of the Gospel to new realms of glory and majesty of existence!

When we rightly ponder on such truths, can you or I ever begin to truly process the magnificence of what took place at Calvary?! Where our mortal eyes fail to see beyond the hills of suffering, Christ Jesus came down from those hills just as the psalmist sang (Psalm 121), to lead us to a land of peace and renewal beyond those fearsome hilltops. We need not fear the high hills of suffering that we know we cannot ascend, for we trust in the One who set the limits of those hills and stands astride them with full eternal power! To seek to understand **who** our Saviour truly is, is to mine the gold-filled quarries of Heavenly glory!

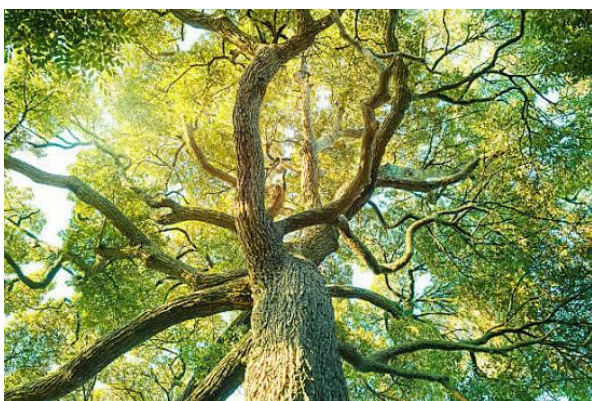
When I consider how God could see all the suffering of the Creation He loves, all because of our rebellion, and still step forward into the sorrow to redeem us, I marvel at a Lord of hosts who proved those most beautiful of words, 'God is love.' (1 John 4:8) For only the immensity and purity of love as held within the heart of God and expressed in the finished work of Christ Jesus on the Cross, can overcome the vast horizon of suffering humanity left at His feet. Only His pure and righteous blood could overcome that sea of woe that was the sins of the world. That blood must have been given in love, for the joy set before Him, that was the

salvation of repentant sinners, for as the old saying goes, 'love conquers all.' Indeed, it does. But no limited love we know in this mortal realm. It is the very nature of God that conquers, for God is love. Amen.

A Breath Of Fresh Air

Recent research conducted by Dr Qing Lin, an immunologist at Nippon Medical School, is beginning to yield potentially interesting results in regard to the unhealthy habits of modern living. Dr Lin has for the past 20 years been investigating the beneficial impacts of 'forest bathing' on the immune system. His studies have revealed some interesting details that can draw a knowing smile from the Bible believer.

Dr Lin has found that trees release phytoncides or antimicrobial volatile organic compounds (VOC's) into forest air. These VOC's are released by plants and trees as a built in defence against damage caused by insects, fungi and harmful bacteria. It is these VOC's being released in significant levels in forest areas, that cause that distinctive 'forest smell', as the name phytoncide comes from the Greek words *phyton* (plant) and *cide* (to kill).



Given that these VOC's fill the forest air, anyone spending a significant amount of time inhaling the forest air, will inhale these VOC's which soon pass into the body's bloodstream. Once in the bloodstream, these phytoncides have been seen to lower cortisol levels (the body's stress hormone), enabling the body to avoid the often-damaging physiological effects that can come from over production of cortisol, particularly on the autonomic nervous system. Furthermore, it has been found that phytoncides can lower blood pressure, reduce inflammation in the body and increase quality of sleep.

Dr Lin has found that the positive effects of these natural phytoncides on the human body, is further evidenced by how they also stimulate the production and activity of white blood cells (NK or Natural Killer cells), a vital part of our body's immune system. It has been estimated that a 3 day and 2 night camping trip, can increase white blood cell activity by up to 80 percent. These positive effects can then linger in the body for up to 1 month after the forest air exposure.

Knowing all this then it is hardly surprising that Adam was placed by God in a garden! God provided an abundant ecosystem that extended into the lush and fertile Pre-Flood world, all so that mankind would be surrounded by an environment that guarded its optimum health. Also, it gives an amazing glimpse into the scientific properties of the Tree of Life itself, and how the Scriptural statement in Revelation 22:2, that the "leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." may not be merely a poetic statement. Perhaps the Tree of Life that stands in the midst of the New Jerusalem, will also produce abundant levels of phytoncides to sustain our glorified bodies state of optimum activity and endurance. It's an interesting thought isn't it! Given how the Lord God is the ultimate scientist, we shouldn't be surprised if this were so. I for one am looking forward to finding out come that happy day when all those in Christ shall walk those heavenly streets!

The Life Of William Cowper (1731-1800)

The life of William Cowper (1731-1800) reminds us that the life of a Christian is often filled with suffering, for as our Master endured suffering, so shall we as His faithful servants (John 15:20). Though this is a heavy reality, with its truth often seen in the lives of many a true believer, it leads us in hope to remember that we have a High Priest in Jesus Christ, who is deeply familiar with our infirmities (Hebrews 4:15). It was this truth, this certain hope in Christ Jesus, that lead William Cowper through troubled mortal days.

Born in Hertfordshire, England, it wasn't long into William's life before tragedy visited the family home. At the tender age of six, William's mother passed away, an event that deeply shaped William's lifelong struggle with depression and anxiety.

Although William was born into a respected family (his uncle Earl Cowper had been Lord Chancellor of England), he never experienced financial security in his adult life. Indeed, for the vast majority of his working life, William relied on the generosity of friends and family to make ends meet. One of those who supported William financially was his cousin Theodora. The pair had hoped to marry (a common practice in 'polite society' of the period), yet this was blocked by Ashley Cowper, William's uncle who carried the societal clout of being the Clerk to the Houses of Parliament. Ashley's blocking of the marriage was based on the point of William's tendency to fall into melancholy and depression.

After this denial of a marriage, the following year, 1756, both William's father and his best friend Sir William Russell, passed away. Many a Christian will know this bitterness of loss well, in how it often seems to strike when the heart is already at a point of lowness.

This series of heartbreaking events came after years of work place frustration. William possessed a keen mind and sharp intellect, having attended Westminster School in London from 1742. Following this period of education, William began training in Law, diligently studying for the Bar at the age of 23. Although William was gifted and able academically, his struggles with anxiety and depression often thwarted any real progress in the workplace. In 1763, when preparing for a public examination for the suitability of the position of Keeper of the Journals in the House of Lords, William seems to have suffered a mental breakdown. The position had rested with the Cowper family for some time, although this time there was a rival candidate, something that seemed to cause immense stress for William, likely triggering the breakdown.



William was sent to an asylum in St Albans led by Dr Cotton. Dr Cotton was one of the first in England to treat such breakdowns as an illness, thus requiring treatment such as prayer to heal the deep wounds incurred. Here, the providential love of God began to become visible in the life of William, as it was in this time of healing through prayer and Bible study, that William came to faith in Jesus Christ. After a year at St Albans, William moved to Huntingdon (where he would be closer to his brother John Cowper), all with the help of a manservant.

In Huntingdon, William made friends with the Unwin family, eventually moving in with them. The matriarch of the Unwin family (Mary Unwin), treated William like a second son, providing William with a much longed for familial stability. Yet tragedy was to strike again, when in 1767, the patriarch of the Unwin family (Rev. Morley Unwin), passed away. On hearing the sad news, the Curate-in-charge of nearby Olney, a certain John Newton (author of *Amazing Grace*), invited the family to move in with him.

Whilst in Olney, William and John Newton became good friends. However, even such a vital and blessed friendship could not stop William from suffering another major breakdown in 1773. William had felt forsaken of God at this time and had stopped joining the Unwin's in attending John's church services. The flame of faith refused to die however, as even during this time, William continued to write occasional hymns with John. These hymns were included in Newton's famous publication the *Olney Hymns* (1779). This publication included the famous hymn *God Moves in a Mysterious Way* (where the saying comes from).

It was after this second major breakdown, that William's creativity really began to spark. In the 1780's, William's poetry became very popular, with the epic poem *The Task* earning him huge, widespread praise for its rich imagery, ease of language and yet deep topics of humanity studied. It was this work, that many scholars credit as the beginning force of the 'Romantic Period' of English Literature.

In these later years, William also joined Newton in becoming a voice against slavery, writing four poems that vocally opposed the practice. One of these poems, 'The Negro's Complaint', would go on to be quoted by Martin Luther King Jr. William continued writing into old age, penning what many consider his finest work *Castaway* in 1799, one year before his death on April 25th, 1800.

William's often troubled life moulded a truly able mind to experience and then articulate in poetry and song, some the deepest sorrows of human existence. It was this incredible ability to put into words the often-felt heartbreak of countless lives, that God used to bring about hymns that many would cling to as a hope filled expression of the suffering they were enduring. It was through the series of losses and hardships, that God moved to bring blessed friendships into William's life; friendships in Christ that would fuel so many beloved hymns we sing today.

William's life reminds us that the Christian life is not immune from tragedy and loss. In fact, sometimes it can be filled with what seems to be an unending barrage of suffering and pain. This suffering can affect the deepest regions of a person, their very mind, so that their suffering is seemingly inescapable. Yet, what we can see from William's life, is that though the battles may be frequent and fierce, the Lord of Hosts, the Good Captain that is our Saviour Jesus Christ, is never far away. He is moving in a mysterious way to ensure that through the suffering, we see His love ever more clearly, giving us a point to push on towards every day. We can push on to that heavenly goal, enduring the suffering all the while, because we trust that one day it will all be over, and that the King of kings will wipe all our tears away with His own nail pierced hands. As William was never alone, so too are all the Redeemed in Christ.

Ramifications Of Needless Division

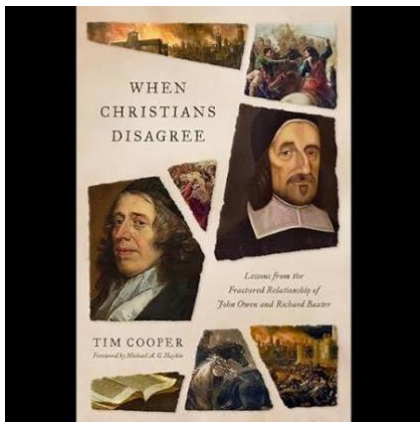
Sometimes, we believers must divide must from another. Where one believer has adopted a diluted Gospel and has embraced corrupted teachings of the Pure Word of God, we who stand by the purity and authority of the Holy Scriptures are to separate from them with a heavy heart. We are to do so if the compromised party refuses to accept correction based upon the inerrant Word of God.

Sometimes though, we can hurriedly make such a final act of separation of fellowship, because we have based it upon secondary differences/preferences of faith, not on doctrine. Such separations can have massive ramifications that can dramatically shape generations to come, and not in a beneficial manner. Church history brings us one powerful example of such a division in the lives of two Puritan greats in John Owen and Richard Baxter. Both held to the same major doctrinal truths, yet such was the personal antagonism between the two men, the Puritan movement never truly recovered from their public fallout.

John and Richard were in many ways, opposites of one another in personality and life experience. John Owen was the highly respected, refined, Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, a man used to prestige and influence, having served as chaplain to Oliver Cromwell. Whilst Owen was an extremely able and learned man, with a still lauded insight into many areas of theology to this day, his manner was sometimes noted for his great dislike for correction or criticism. This weakness of pride seen countless times over in many great men, would play out in his interactions with the similarly highly respected Puritan leader that was Richard Baxter (a man who was also noted by some as being arrogant and stubborn in the face of correction or criticism).

Baxter on the other hand was a rugged, self-educated man who had refused to attend the privileged ranks of the Oxbridge elite. Baxter similarly served as a chaplain during the English Civil War, although his experience was not reserved to the halls of academia. Instead, it was gained on the bloody battlefields of the violent conflict. Baxter viewed the war as God's judgment on the nation, whilst Owen, from the safer realms of the university halls, viewed the conflict as a blessed time of opportunity for reform. The truth is probably somewhere in the middle, with God using the conflict to punish those in power whose corruption had seen the persecution of simple believers across the land; whilst it also opened up the way to a huge political and religious reform that would pave the way for the growth of the Protestant faith across the world.

Owen favoured a more formal approach to doctrinal confessions, all to protect Protestant teaching and unity. Baxter on the other hand, whilst holding the same doctrinal stand on a great many important doctrines of faith, favoured a simpler, minimal creed of faith that would bring the Protestant churches together. In short, the life experiences of the two men which were markedly different, imposed themselves on their views of faith and its safeguarding. Again, a good midground would have been to utilise the clearly delineated structure of Owen's approach to the guarding of Protestant doctrine; yet delivered under the simpler banner of teaching that



Baxter possessed. Then the 'average joe' could understand the importance of following clear, Biblical doctrines in their daily walk of faith.

Reaching such a potentially fruitful and unifying creed of Protestant faith under the leadership of these two great servants of God, was the hope of many within England. In 1654, these two leaders of the Puritan movement were invited to settle their differences in person. The aim was that these two remarkable men could pool their knowledge of the Scriptures. The goal, to produce a unifying creed of faith that would bring together the still growing Protestant churches in England.

This public dislike of one another, however, began when Baxter reluctantly critiqued one of Owen's publications, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. Owen did not take kindly to the criticism and sent Baxter a pointed reply. This then fuelled Baxter's views on Owen, causing him to believe that Owen was teaching falsehoods. Baxter believed that Owen's strict view on divine election would lead people to live sinfully (known as antinomianism). This public dispute caused Owen to lump Baxter in with his other theological opponents, as Owen was suspicious of Baxter's view on the importance of human choice in salvation. Owen argued Baxter's view undermined grace and veered towards what he viewed as heresy (under the label of Arminianism).

So, with this history of public disputes between the two as the backdrop of the 1654 meeting between them, the Protestant Church in England looked for some unifying creed of faith. This would act as a potential unifying banner which all the churches in the land could unite and lead the nation in one accord, in the hope of restoring the realm after a brutal civil war.

Sadly however, the dislike and distrust between the two leaders of the Puritan movement in England, led to no clear outcome from the meeting. No compromise could be found, and so no unifying creed of faith for Protestantism in the land was gained. The Protestant Church in England remained fractured, leaving a golden opportunity for reconciliation under the Word of God empty of potential fulfilment.

Into this religious void, stepped the deeply divisive Act of Uniformity in 1662. This Act removed all influence of Puritan teaching from the Church of England, leading to many faithful pastors and educators (such as Owen and Baxter) to be expelled from the national church. Indeed, many of these faithful and knowledgeable servants of God, were imprisoned for their defiant stand against the Act; whilst many others fled the persecution and settled overseas in Europe and the Americas.

If these two great minds of Puritan teaching could've come to some measure of accord and unity in 1654, it would've been highly likely that both Baxter and Owen would've been invited by the newly restored monarchy, under Charles II, to attend the Savoy Conference of 1661. This conference was called to bring some measure of unity to the Church of England through clear, unifying creeds of faith. Baxter's demands were dismissed at this conference, partly due to his brash nature. This dismissal allowed the angered bishops of the Anglican denomination, to move to have such dissenters as Baxter and Owen removed from all influence in the national church. Perhaps if Owen had been there also, with a well-established Protestant creed of faith to call upon, the divisive work of the disgruntled Anglican clergy may never have occurred.

It could be argued therefore, that the needless division, fuelled by personal antagonism, between Owen and Baxter had immense ramifications upon the very make-up of the Church of England to this very day! Imagine what could've been if these two great minds had put aside their personal views and interpretations, in the

desire to bring one clear creed of faith for the nation! God did exactly this work when He pulled very different men and their views together in the production of the AV/KJV Bible! A Bible that has brought more souls to Christ Jesus than all other versions combined! Consider also, how the theologically rich teaching of the Puritans would've underpinned the foundations of the Church of England for generations. Furthermore, much of the persecution experienced by the Puritans in this land may never have taken place.

It is a deeply sobering consideration, what could've been had two brilliant men come together with a willingness to discuss their differences and meet in reconciliation under the guiding truth of God's Word. How many times has such a needless division taken place since?! Yet there is always God's grace even in such sad actions of men to take solace in. For the persecution endured by the expelled Puritans under the Act of Uniformity, caused many of these faithful and learned souls to take their understanding of God to new nations. God used the frailties of men, to further the spread of the Gospel, foiling the seditious plans of Satan in the process.

Many times, Christians have separated from one another over personal preferences of faith, rather than on doctrinal differences. Let's take this warning from history and rightly divide from one another where necessary to guard the Pure Word of God. However, let this be done with a heart that seeks reconciliation between brothers in Christ, all through correction by Scriptural authority (Galatians 6:1, Matthew 18:15). All so that we may live the words of the Bible and encourage one another to bring forth good fruit in the name of Christ Jesus.

Resource Corner



<https://youtu.be/3VeYO6hmKGs?si=t7gc6r56LcHzydca>

Puritan: All of Life to the Glory of God | Documentary | Reformation Heritage Books

Feature length documentary featuring well known ministers such as Kevin De Young, Joel Beeke, Sinclair Ferguson, Stephen Nichols and many more. This well-researched documentary explores the

history of the Puritans and considers both their impact and legacy on the Protestant faith to this day.



https://youtu.be/4BYv86_w7RM?si=4SUsdupVOk-ZI_fy

How China's Communist Party is tightening its grip on Christianity

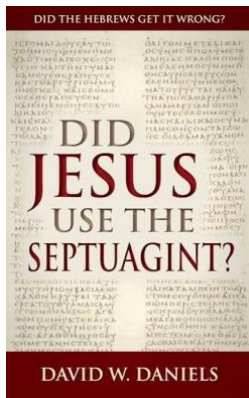
Sky News featurette investigating the growing persecution being felt by our brothers and sisters in Christ in China.



<http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLlbUxFqjia8833Abnv66xw>

Hymns of Grace (YouTube channel)

Series of live performances of classic hymns sung by talented singers all accompanied by skilled musicians. A whole variety of beloved, theologically rich hymns to enjoy, all sung with beauty and reverence. A wonderful musical resource for every believer in Christ.



Did Jesus read the Septuagint?

That's what they may have taught your pastor in college. Do you know why?

Simple: the Septuagint contains the Apocrypha, and there are people who want your pastor (and you) to have the Apocrypha in your Bible, too. Why? So you will accept Catholic superstitions like:

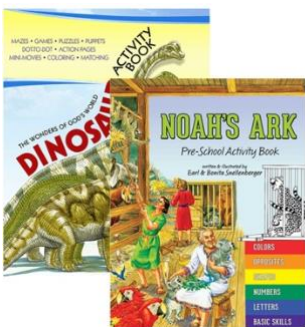
- Purgatory and prayers for the dead
- Payment to forgive sins
- Angels as mediators

In this new book, David Daniels takes each of the “proofs” promoting a BC Septuagint and shows why they can’t be trusted. He shows that Jesus read the same Hebrew Scriptures read by every other devout Jew.

Don’t be fooled by the push for “One World Bible for One World Religion.”

Available from Amazon and Chick.com

Children's Activity Book Combo



Dinosaur Activity Book

A great value activity book, providing hours of fun!

Educational and entertaining, this book includes mazes, puzzles, dot-to-dots and other skill challenges. Create a Deinonychus jumping jack, craft a Tyrannosaurus hand puppet, master a Pteranodon marionette, solve 15 challenging tangram puzzles, and more! Dozens of hands-on and skill-building activities are included for a variety of age levels. Plus, learn the history of dinosaur discoveries and about the lives of these incredible creatures created on Day 5 and Day 6 of the Creation Week.

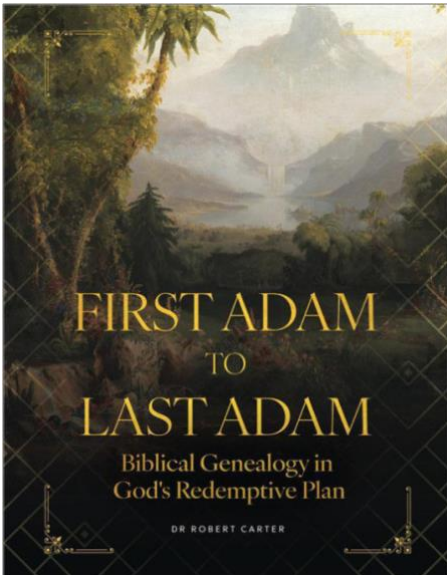
Noah's Ark Pre-School Activity Book

Little learners will discover:

- Colours:
- From different animals to the wonder of rainbows, children have the opportunity to discover a collection of wonderful colours that make God’s world beautiful!
- Opposites:
- Empty and full, big and small, dark and light, short and tall, children will learn important opposites and see Noah’s family preparing for the Flood!
- Numbers:
- Learn how Noah’s ark contains numbers 1 to 10 as you begin counting, reading and writing these numbers as you practice them again!
- Shapes:

- Hearts and circles, ovals and squares, you can find so many shapes among the ark and the animals while learning important biblical details!
- Letters:
- From antelopes to zebras, yaks and koalas, and more, learn capital letters and little ones too, discovering the alphabet animal names for Noah's floating zoo!
- Basic Skills:
- Singing Noah's alphabet song, deciding right from left, and saying letters and numbers in order are among the skills that you learn!

Available from Answers in Genesis UK



First Adam To Last Adam (Book)

From the opening chapters of Genesis to the arrival of Christ, the Bible preserves an unbroken thread of hope. *First Adam to Last Adam* follows that thread, tracing the messianic line through Scripture and revealing how God faithfully preserved His redemptive plan across generations.

Along the way, the book explores fascinating side paths that shed light on some of the Bible's most puzzling passages. Through careful biblical analysis, the genealogies—often overlooked by readers—emerge as powerful testimony to God's providence, faithfulness, and purpose in history.

Whether you're a seasoned student of Scripture or encountering these passages for the first time, *First Adam to Last Adam* will help you see the Bible's family records in a new light. By the final page, the full sweep of

the story becomes clear—from humanity's fall in the first Adam to the triumph of grace in the last Adam—and why every name in the Bible truly matters.

Available September 2026 from Creation Ministries International UK

Useful Websites

Answersingenesis.co.uk

Creation.com

Timefortruth.co.uk

Kingjamesbibleonline.org

Livingwaters.com

Truthtowonder.org

A Final Thought

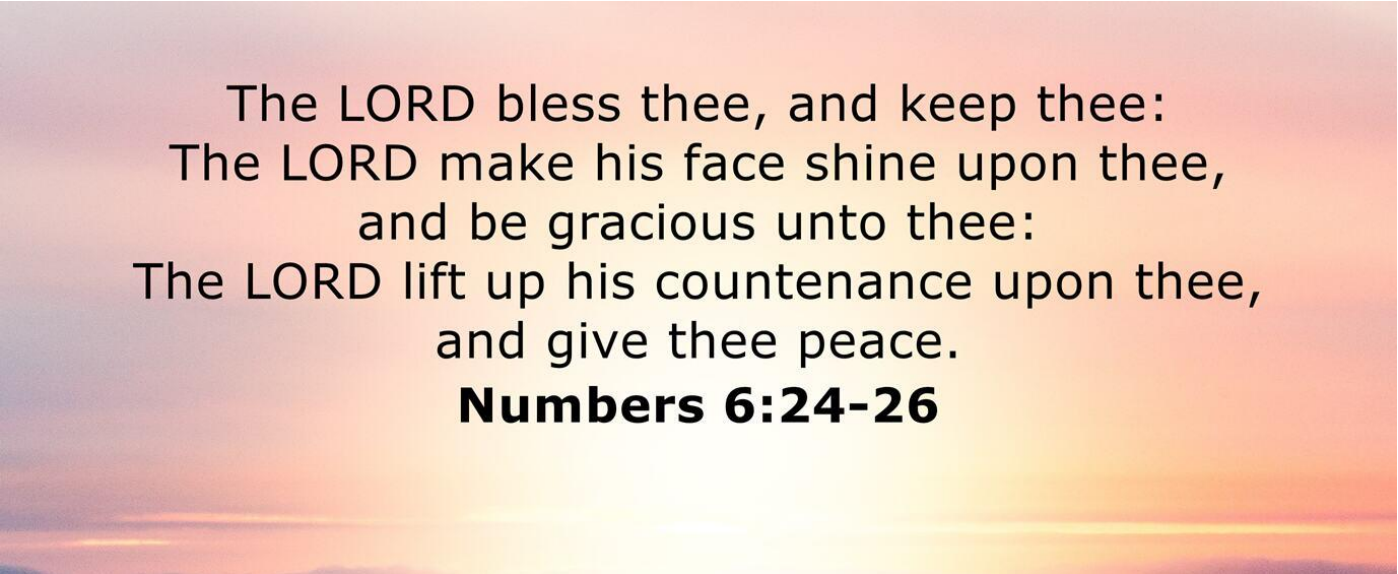
At the close of the June heatwave, I thought I'd tackle the ever-growing weeds that emerge in our driveway borders and between the garden patio slabs. My reasoning was that the extreme heat would've weakened the stubborn roots of the assorted weeds, thereby making it much easier to pull them up. As I went about my business, this is exactly what I found. When my family and I attempted the same job just a week before, the weeds were firmly rooted in their spot as they were fresh and strong thanks to the temperate weather of previous few weeks. So, when I easily slipped the weeds from their parched roots the morning after the heatwave finally broke, I was relieved indeed that at last the driveway would be weed free.

As I was going about this task, I thought on how this all reflected a Biblical truth. We often wonder why, as believers in Christ, we are allowed to go through seasons that are very testing. It can seem at times, as though the trials and exhausting hardships will go on and on, just like the burning heatwave did for the driveway weeds. Yet, there is a purpose to such hard, tiring battles of the spirit. That being the removal of those weeds of sin that lurk in each of us.

You see, when things are going well in life, we can easily grow unwanted 'roots' in the ways of the world. Those 'roots' get more embedded in our lives, as pleasant days of easy living waters the spiritual ground of our hearts. Thus, we soon find that more and more space in our hearts is being taken up by sinful 'weeds', choking the healthy fruits of the Spirit.

The Lord does not want His witnesses for the purity and truth of the Gospel, to be so overcome by an embracing of the ways of the world. He wants our hearts filled with healthy fruits of the Spirit, so that our lives are like a beautiful garden, one that invites others to come and see the work of the gardener of our lives, that being Christ Jesus. So, He will sometimes allow a period of hardship, to weaken those roots of worldly ways that have caused spiritual weeds to emerge in the life of the believer. He will allow those testing times to remain as long as needed until those roots are sufficiently weakened, so that when He goes to remove them from our hearts, we do not resist Him. If anything, we plead with Him to remove them, so that we can have a beautiful heart of rest in Christ, like that offered by a well-kept garden.

We can see then that such times of hardship, are not allowed in cruelty or negligence by God. Quite the opposite! He wants us to have our roots firmly established in Christ Jesus, the true vine, the one whose branches bring forth good fruit. Sometimes, for this to happen, He must allow days of burning heat to wither away the roots we've planted in the world. Then, we will not resist His cultivating of our heart. Instead, we will praise Him for it, rejoicing that His hand has cared for us throughout. Amen.



The LORD bless thee, and keep thee:
The LORD make his face shine upon thee,
and be gracious unto thee:
The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee,
and give thee peace.
Numbers 6:24-26