

GRACE **IN** FOCUS

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JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2013

A LOYAL-LOVE **BY PHILIPPE R. STERLING**

GUARANTEED TRANSFORMATION?

BY BOB WILKIN

GOD LOVES ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE

BY DIANE BORING

AND MORE

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CONTENTS:

- 3/ A LOYAL-LOVE**
BY PHILIPPE R. STERLING
- 5/ LOVE POURED FORTH**
BY ZANE C. HODGES
- 6/ GUARANTEED TRANSFORMATION?**
BY BOB WILKIN
- 9/ GOD LOVES ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE**
BY DIANE BORING
- 10/ A RIGHTEOUS REASON NOT TO PRAY**
BY JEREMY EDMONDSON
- 12/ ARE THE SIGN GIFTS STILL VALID?**
WITH BOB WILKIN
- 15/ TRIUNE LOVE**
BY S. C. LAZAR

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We start the New Year ever eager to proclaim the message of God's love in Christ. But what does it mean to love? In our culture, the term is practically a cliché. People 'love' their toothpaste, conditioner, video games, children, spouse, car, and job. And when things get tough, they are just as apt to stop loving each of those things. What do you make of a word that can be used so indiscriminately in our popular culture (though not in the Bible)?

It is helpful to be reminded of just how powerful the Biblical image of love really is. The depth of marital love is explored by Philippe Sterling's meditation on Ruth, Boaz, and God's *chesed*; in an excerpt from his forthcoming *Romans* commentary, Zane Hodges explains how trials can give us a deeper appreciation of God's love; Jeremy Edmondson reflects upon the nature of God's love and intercessory prayer; Diane Boring sees God's loving providence at work in everyday circumstances, while Shawn Lazar points out the connection between love and the Trinitarian life of God.

On a different note, I have an article concerning the claim that God guarantees that all believers will be spiritually transformed in this life. And finally, we have a Q&A about the sign gifts.

I hope and pray that in the coming year you will know Jesus' love for you, and will be moved to share that love with others.

Warmly,

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A Loyal-Love

By Philippe R. Sterling

A DIFFERENT KIND OF LOVE

In the day before there was e-mail or texting, a young man wrote a letter to his beloved (from Clyde Murdock's, *A Treasury of Humor*):

My dear Laura,
I would climb the highest
mountain to see your face,
swim the widest river for your
touch, cross the burning desert
for your kiss.
With everlasting love,
Bill

P.S. I will see you on
Saturday—if it doesn't rain.

Are we fair-weather lovers?

One of the qualities of God that the Bible highlights is His loyal-love. The Hebrew word is *chesed*. It is often translated as "lovingkindness" but is best understood as "loyal-love". It is the great word at the center of God's covenant relationship with His people. For example, Deut 7:9 connects God's keeping of His covenant with His loyal-love. Nelson Glueck concludes

in his classic study of the word that *chesed* can be rendered by "loyalty," "mutual aid," or "reciprocal love." Katherine Sakenfeld updates Glueck's study and summarizes the meaning of the word as "a responsible keeping of faith with another with whom one is in a relationship." Their studies show that *chesed* can represent both human conduct and divine conduct.

RUTH'S DEVOTION

The Book of Ruth in the Old Testament showcases believers who emulate God's loyal-love. Two major characters who demonstrate this kind of love are Ruth and Boaz.

Ruth provides a pleasing picture of loyal-love. The writer stresses her devotion and dedication by her statement, her acts, and her commendation by other characters.

Ruth makes an extraordinary statement of personal, national, and spiritual identification with Naomi in 1:16-17. Both the context and the structure of the statement stress the great loyalty of Ruth. The context relates Naomi's attempts to dissuade Ruth and Orpah, her two widowed daughters-in law, from following her back to Bethlehem. Her arguments make use of personal, national, and spiritual motives. She manages to persuade Orpah but she fails to convince

Ruth. Orpah is not portrayed negatively but only serves to stress Ruth's extraordinary commitment. The structure of Ruth's statement centers on her identification with Naomi's nationality and faith and ends with an oath which indicates that Yahweh is her God. Ruth's words accentuate her loyalty and self-renouncing faithfulness to the person, nation, and God of Naomi.

Ruth also demonstrates loyal-love through her acts. In chapter one she clings to Naomi and returns with her to Bethlehem. She is more committed to her mother-in-law than to her own needs or to social custom. In chapter two she takes the initiative to provide for Naomi and herself by gleaning in the fields. She goes with the approval of Naomi, performs her work diligently, shows deference to Boaz, graciously accepts his favor, brings home the fruits of her labor and the leftovers of her meal, reports to Naomi, and accepts her advice. She shows herself to be loyal, diligent, and humble. In chapter three she carries out without question Naomi's instructions concerning claiming Boaz as a kinsman-redeemer. Ruth is a model of loyal-love.

In addition, several of the other characters commend Ruth for her love. In 1:8 Naomi prays for her because she practiced loyal-love with her

continued on p. 4

One of the qualities of God that the Bible highlights is His loyal-love.

husband and with her. In 2:11-12 Boaz prays for her because of the kindness she showed to Naomi. In 3:10-11 he pledges to redeem her because of the loyal-love she showed in choosing him over other men and because all of the townspeople knew her to be a woman of noble character. In 4:14 a chorus of women praises her and counts her more worthy than the ideal number of sons. These affirmations of Ruth's character and conduct ratify the fact that she is an embodiment of what constitutes living in *chesed*.

BOAZ'S NOBILITY

Boaz, like Ruth, demonstrates loyal-love. He fulfills the letter and the spirit of the law. The narrator introduces him as a man of noble character (2:1). His observance of the law, his kindness to Ruth, his adherence to proper procedure, and his willingness to redeem Elimelech's land and acquire Ruth as his wife validate this description.

Boaz obeys the law of God during a period of general neglect and disobedience in the days when the judges governed. He appears as a model employer greeting his laborers in the name of Yahweh and treating them gently and respectfully (2:4). He allows the poor to glean in his fields in fulfillment of Lev 23:22. He is kind to strangers (Deut 2:14).

Boaz exceeds the demands of the law and displays extraordinary kindness. He lets Ruth glean freely in his field in accordance with the law but then adds his protection and provision. He shares his meal with her (2:14) and issues commands for her safety and abundant success in gleaning (2:15-16).

Boaz shows his righteous and responsible character in his adherence to proper procedure. He pledges to redeem Ruth only if a nearer kinsman fails to do so (3:12-13). He will not usurp another man's right to act responsibly.

Boaz' willingness to redeem the field of Elimelech and acquire Ruth as his wife stands in contrast to the attitude

of the nearer kinsman who was willing to redeem the field but shunned his responsibility to marry Ruth. As in the case of Orpah, this unnamed kinsman functions as a foil to emphasize Boaz's greater loyalty. Boaz goes on to legally settle the matter of redeeming the field of Elimelech and acquiring Ruth as his wife to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance (4:9-10).

The loyal-love of believers provides a basis for the blessing of God

Both Boaz and Ruth exemplify the qualities of loyal-love. God brings them together to become the ancestors of David (4:13-17) and ultimately Jesus the Messiah (Mat 1:1-6).

FIDELITY AND REWARD

The loyal-love of believers provides a basis for the blessing of God. The story of Ruth emphasizes that divine blessing follows human faithfulness. This is expressed through the prayers of blessing for Ruth by Naomi and Boaz (1:8-9; 2:12; 3:10), through the prayer of blessing for Boaz by Naomi (2:20), and through the prayer of blessing for Boaz and Ruth by the people of Bethlehem (4:11-12).

Naomi puts forward the past loyalty of Orpah and Ruth as the basis for invoking the loyal-love of Yahweh (1:8-9). She prays specifically that they find security in marriage. There

is a clear connection between their kind deeds in the past and her supplication that Yahweh should reward their deeds in the future.

Boaz invokes Yahweh's blessing on Ruth after he recapitulates her record of loyalty to Naomi (2:11-12). He prays that Yahweh recompense her because her kind acts and her identification of herself with Naomi evidence the fact that she has placed herself under the protection of the God of Israel.

The other blessings follow the same pattern of fidelity and reward. Naomi blesses Boaz on account of his kind deeds to Ruth (2:20). Boaz blesses Ruth a second time when she performs another act of loyal-love in choosing him as a kinsman-redeemer. The people of Bethlehem who have witnessed Boaz' act of family loyalty in marrying Ruth ask that his house be blessed as a reward for such fidelity (4:11-12). The loyal acts of individuals form the basis for a supplication that Yahweh should bless them.

It's important to note that this pattern of fidelity and reward is not a mechanical doctrine. It is a confident affirmation that God's blessing should follow living in loyal-love. The words of blessing are prayers and not statement of doctrine. The inexplicable tragedies of famine and death in the story indicate that there is nothing automatic about the blessing of God. The point is that God's people can be confident that He will turn death into life and complaint into praise as they live in loyal-love before Him. The Book of Ruth shows that when a person commits himself to this kind of life God will act behind the scenes to direct him. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in his favor all manner of unforeseen incidents, meetings, and material assistance.

A MUTUAL SACRIFICE

A modern example of loyal-love is Robertson McQuilkin, president of Columbia Bible College and Seminary. His wife, Muriel, was diagnosed with

Alzheimer's disease. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, McQuilkin revealed that he was torn between two commitments, caring for his wife and being president of the college and seminary. As Muriel needed more and more of him, he wrestled with who should get him full time. Finally he made the decision to care for her and resigned from Columbia Bible College and Seminary. In his resignation speech he said:

I haven't in my life experienced easy decision-making on major decisions. But one of the simplest and clearest decisions I've had to make is this one, because circumstances dictated it. Muriel now, in the last couple of months, seems to be almost happy when with me

and almost never happy when not with me. In fact she seems to feel trapped, becomes very fearful...and when she can't get to me there can be anger; she's in distress. But when I am with her she's happy and contented. And so I must be with her at all times. And you see, it's not only that I promised in sickness and in health till death do us part, and I am a man of my word, but as I have...said publicly, it's the only fair thing. She sacrificed for me for forty years, to make my life possible. So if I cared for her for forty years, I would still be in debt. However, there is much more. It's not that I have to; it's that I get to. I love her very dearly, and you can tell it's not easy to talk about. She is a delight. It's a great honor to care for such a wonderful person.

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren... Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and in truth.
—1 John 3:16, 18

...applying all diligence, in your faith supply...brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
—2 Peter 2:5-8

IGES

Love Poured Forth

By Zane Hodges

From his forthcoming *Romans* commentary.

5:5. Now expectation does not result in shame, because the love of God is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

The **expectation** that is produced in us through enduring our trials and becoming approved in God's sight, promotes a boldness about our Christian profession. What Paul means is that we can *unashamedly* (i.e., boldly) *confess* such a believing *expectation*. Paul will address the theme of confessing Christ in 10:5-13, a passage in which he affirms that "everyone who believes in Him shall not be ashamed."

The fundamental reason why this freedom from shame can be realized is now traced to a rich inner experience of **the love of God**. So far from our "afflictions" creating a sense of distance and estrangement from God, they can actually usher in a deeper appreciation of His love. As these afflictions are properly endured, producing qualities in us of which God approves, it is as though *the love of God is poured forth in our hearts*. That is to say that our hearts are suffused with His love as **the Holy Spirit** makes that love a joyous realization within us.

With these words, Paul has reached the climax of his "staircase" treatment of the benefits of justification. Justification by faith results in *peace with,*

and *access to*, the God from whom we were formerly estranged, and is accompanied by an *expectation of future glory*. This *expectation*, in turn, is enhanced by experiencing the afflictions which God uses to mold us into persons who have His approval. And that process itself leads to a grand realization of how much we are *loved* by Him.

Paul's description in 5:1-5 of the rich quality of the Christian's post-justification experience serves as part of a bridge section (5:1-11) leading to a detailed exposition of precisely this experience (Rom 5:12-8:38). But Paul's words *already* imply the meaningfulness of the last phrase of his thematic statement in 1:17: "The one who is righteous by faith *shall live*." IGES

Guaranteed Transformation?

By Bob Wilkin

THE CHARGE: SUCCESS GUARANTEED

Many pastors and theologians say that God guarantees that all believers will be righteous. For example, blogger Matt Waymeyer in an article entitled, "First Corinthians 6, the 'Lordship' Debate and the Gospel," dated Aug 17, 2012, concludes his article by saying:

There is no third category of individuals who have been truly converted but who continue in the same unbroken pattern of wickedness that previously characterized their lives.

Waymeyer is rejecting the Free Grace notion that a person might have the free gift of everlasting life and yet fail in the Christian life. At the start of the article, he gave this quote from John MacArthur:

I have never taught that some pre-salvation works of righteousness are necessary to or part of salvation. But I do believe without apology that real salvation cannot, and will not, fail to produce works of righteousness in the life of a true believer. There are no human works in

the saving act, but God's work of salvation includes a change of intent, will, desire, and attitude that inevitably produces the fruit of the Spirit.

Similar quotes could be multiplied. What if this were true? What if God indeed makes such a guarantee?

While the Scriptures *do not* teach that God makes such a guarantee, He *could* have. If He had, we might wonder why God would guarantee only partial sinlessness, but not complete sinlessness.

However, I suppose it's possible there might be some reason why He could have promised that. If so, what would be the practical ramifications of such a promise?

RAMIFICATION #1: ANYONE COULD EASILY IDENTIFY THE REGENERATE

Let's say that John Doe came to faith in Christ 20 years ago at the age of 20. John came from a rough background. He had been an immoral alcoholic good-for-nothing. The very day he came to faith, he stopped drinking and womanizing. His language immediately cleaned up. He became a sober, godly, industrious, loving man of God.

Now twenty years later, John is happily married and has four well-adjusted and godly children.

Anyone who saw John would be amazed at the changes. His entire way of life was different.

John did have a few weeks in the first year of his new life in which he slipped back into the old ways. But even then, the sins were relatively minor and he did not linger in them for long.

Imagine that every born again person lost all his or her hair and lost all pigmentation in their skin. Anyone would tell just by looking at them that they were regenerate.

Well, this sort of moral transformation would be just as obvious.

Imagine the perfection of the Lord Jesus and then back off just a bit. That is what a born again person would be like.



He would not be sinless (Rom 3:23; 1 John 1:8, 10). But he would be Christ-like in all he said and did.

**RAMIFICATION #2:
ALL REGENERATE
PEOPLE WOULD BE
GREAT SOUL-WINNERS**

God wants believers to evangelize (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). Thus if transformation is guaranteed, all believers would be great soul-winners. While some would be better at it than others, there would be no such thing as a regenerate person who was shy about sharing his faith.

Every believer would be an aggressive, yet loving, soul-winner. Rarely a day would go by when a believer would fail to share his faith with one or more people. Every believer would have scores of converts.

**RAMIFICATION #3:
DIVORCE WOULD BE
NON EXISTENT AMONG
THE REGENERATE**

Since God hates divorce (Mal 2:16), if success were guaranteed, then divorce would seemingly never occur among believers. However, since (in this view) God does allow short periods of failure, it might be possible that both spouses would fail at the same time and might quickly institute a divorce and have it finalized before one or both of them came back to their senses. Even then, in nearly every case they would remarry right away because failure for the regenerate is but for a very short while.

You'd be able to look at a married couple and know they were Christians. Imagine two people living together where both were controlled by the Holy Spirit 24/7/365. Such a couple would be near perfect spouses, parents, neighbors, and friends.

**RAMIFICATION #4:
THE REGENERATE WOULD ALL
BE FANTASTIC EMPLOYEES
AND EMPLOYERS**

If you were a believer and you ran a company, you could be sure to have top notch employees by hiring the regenerate. There would be no such thing as a regenerate employee who was half-hearted in his work. All would give 100% all the time. All believing employees would arrive early and remain after closing time. They would never take too long for a break or for lunch. They

would never lie, cheat, or steal. Gossip would not happen. Never would a complaint be heard.

Even unbelievers would go out of their way to hire Christians because such employees would be far and away better than any other employees.

I've not been a perfect boss for the quarter century GES has been in existence. Ask my current or former employees. I wish I had been. I've had to grow, and I still need to grow as a boss. Being born again did not automatically make me a good manager. I wish it had. But I've had a lot to learn and I still do.

**RAMIFICATION #5:
ASSURANCE WOULD
INEVITABLY BE TIED
TO WORKS**

Seemingly even if all this were true, assurance would still be based on God's promise to the believer of everlasting life that can never be lost, and not on the transformed life. No godly person would base his assurance on his imperfect works, would he?

However, practically speaking, there would be no way around it. If a person who believed God's promise started seeing long periods of besetting sins (i.e., jealousy, envy, or strife) in his life, he would clearly have an internal conflict. On the one hand, he would know that he was born again based on the promise of John 3:16. But on the other hand he would know that he was not living the transformed life that is guaranteed to regenerate people. So he would see a contradiction in Scripture. But Scripture has no contradictions. So he would search out a way to resolve the dilemma. The solution would be either to redefine the belief of John 3:16 as commitment, obedience, and perseverance (and thus he'd adopt Lordship Salvation), or the solution would be to reject the idea that transformation is guaranteed (and thus he'd adopt Free Grace).



continued on p. 8

8 GUARANTEED?

Here are the two different syllogisms:

LORDSHIP SALVATION SYLLOGISM:

Major premise: Transformation is guaranteed to all who believe in Jesus.

Minor premise: I do not see clear proof of a truly transformed life.

Conclusion: I do not believe in Jesus.

FREE GRACE SYLLOGISM:

Major premise: All who believe in Jesus have everlasting life.

Minor premise: I believe in Jesus.

Conclusion: I have everlasting life.

If someone is convinced that transformation is guaranteed, then it is almost certain he will begin to base his assurance on his works. And once that happens, it is certain that he will have serious doubts about his salvation unless his life is so exemplary that even he himself was amazed by his own lifestyle.

IF TRANSFORMATION WERE GUARANTEED, THEN IT WOULD BE EASY TO SEE

When I taught at Multnomah, a friend of mine, Dr. Garry Friesen, regularly sent his Bible College students to Charismatic meetings. He wanted them to listen and watch and take notes. Does the so-called “speaking in tongues” sound like real languages,

or does it sound like *ohwhatafool-amishecameinahondaicantiemybowtie ohwhatafoolamishecameinahondaicantiemybowtie* repeated over and over again? How do the healing services compare to the healings in Scripture? What types of healings take place? Did you see any actual verifiable healings?

Every time, Garry’s students found that what they observed failed to measure up to Scripture. Thus Garry’s students came to see for themselves that the sign gifts are not operating today in any meetings they could find.

In the same way, we can test the guarantee of transformation by keeping our eyes open. Do we see near perfection in our own lives? Do we see near perfection in the lives of the people in our churches? Do we see it in the lives of all who name the name of Christ? If not, then we should go back to the Scriptures and re-examine the supposed guarantees of transformation prior to death or the Rapture.

IF TRANSFORMATION IS NOT GUARANTEED, THEN THAT TEACHING IS ACTUALLY QUITE DETRIMENTAL

Lordship Salvation is surely very well intentioned. And, frankly, it is a neat idea. Wouldn’t it be great if transformation were guaranteed?


Wouldn’t all believing churches be remarkable places since they would be made up entirely of nearly perfect people?

But that just isn’t the case. Indeed, as Paul says in Gal 5:15, “But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!” This teaching of guaranteed transformation produces churches where pastors actually tell their counselees who report struggles with sin in their lives, “Have you ever considered that your problem might be that you are not really born again. No born again person could talk to his wife the way you talk to yours.” Or, “How could you be a real believer if you are constantly boasting and are clearly a very prideful person?”

Why would this be confined to pastoral counseling? Husbands would question whether their wives were really born again. Parents would question the eternal destiny of their kids. Women would question the spiritual position of other women in their church.

Is that not biting and devouring one another? Is that not what well-intentioned legalism does?

The teaching of guaranteed transformation sounds good. But it is really very bad indeed.

I’m glad my assurance is not at all tied to my thoughts, words, and deeds. I’m a recovering perfectionist. I struggle daily with perfectionistic thinking. I beat myself up a lot. I don’t match up to the picture I have in my head of what a perfect person looks like, i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ. I’ve come to accept my shortcomings and my oh-so-slow growth, but they still bother me a lot. I long for the day when I have a glorified body and I no longer struggle with sin and failure. And I know that day is coming, because I know that John 3:16 is true. The Lord promised everlasting life to all who *believe in Him*, not to all who *behave in Him*. Thank you Lord! 





God Loves All People Everywhere: Acts 17:26-27

By Diane Boring

I will always remember the first time that Acts 17:26-27 jumped out at me. My first grandchild, Summer, was just a few weeks old. I remember going in and sitting on the bed next to her and reading this passage to her mother who was standing in the room. I said something like this: “*Look at this verse. It makes me think of little Summer.*” Then I quoted it:

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.

God had created Summer at this time in history, and given her to this family, in this place, because He loves her and wants her to seek Him and find Him. I will never forget how that verse affected me.

But did I understand it correctly? Today I read it again, and it is just as clear to me now as it was then. I believe that God so loved the world that He created each person at the best time in history for them to be born, and under the best circumstances for them to seek Him and find Him if they so desire. But He never forces Himself on anyone. He offers Himself as a free gift.

I was curious to see what *The Grace New Testament Commentary* said, and was pleased to see that it confirmed what I noticed years before. In his commentary on Acts 17:26-27, Al Valdes states:

Paul reflects the Book of Genesis, affirming that God created **every nation of men** from the same blood for the purpose of inhabiting the earth. In addition,

God determined when and where they fit into history. God established these beneficial chronological and geographical boundaries “so that they should seek the Lord.” He did this so they would perhaps **grope for Him and find Him**. In this way Paul explains how the **unknown God** has placed mankind in the best possible position to come to the knowledge of Him. In fact, the apostle asserts that **He is not far from each one of us**...Paul’s statement shows that all persons of sound mind can seek and find Him. Paul did not contradict what he says here when he wrote in Rom 3:11 that “no one seeks God.” In Rom 3:11 Paul is saying that men never seek God *on their own initiative*. But since God draws all to Himself (John 12:32), all can respond to God and seek Him.


Commenting on the next verse (v 28), Valdes said that Paul, “explained God’s *nearness to everyone* (and thus His accessibility), affirming that **in Him we live and move and have our being**.”

I am reminded of Zvi, a 10-year-old Jewish boy who was separated from his parents during the Holocaust and survived on his own during Hitler’s terrible reign. He found his way to Israel and to faith in the Messiah. His story testifies to God’s drawing. Zvi looked to Christ and was saved. The same thing can happen to anyone. God has placed people in the best possible circumstance to find Him, so long as they want Him and respond to the light He gives them along their life’s journey.

We read in John 1:9: “That was the true Light which gives light to *every man* coming into the world” (emphasis mine).

Jesus said in John 12:32, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* to Myself” (emphasis mine).

Dale and I now have many grandchildren. We thank God for each one of them. They all bring such joy to our hearts. When I look at each one of them I remember Acts 17:26-27, and rejoice at a loving, caring, merciful, gracious God who put them in our lives in the hope that they would seek Him and find Him.

To God alone be all the glory and praise for what He has done! 

A Righteous Reason Not to Pray

by Jeremy Edmondson

SURPRISED BY THE WORD

More than likely, we have all been in the situation of reading a familiar passage of God's Word when something leaps off the page and takes us by surprise. Maybe observation after observation, and meditation after meditation, yielded a greater understanding. Maybe the Holy Spirit used a particular verse to soften an increasingly calloused heart. Or maybe it was a nagging question that could not be shaken. The last option was true of me, while reading John 17. This prayer, offered by our great High Priest, is full of insight into the depths of Jesus' care for His sheep, and His infinite relationship with the Father.

The flow of John 17 is fascinating. Jesus is clear concerning all that God has done, and is doing, regarding the glory of the Son. He asks intently that believers would experience fellowship with one another, and with the Father and the Son.

But anyone who reads this prayer must admit that verse 9 seems to strike against the grain of the rest of this chapter. It reads, "I pray for them. *I do not pray for the world* but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours" (*emphasis mine*). If you are like me, when you came across this line, you thought, "What? How odd! I mean, wouldn't it be more productive to pray for the world? After all, they are the 'lost ones!'" Why would Jesus make such a statement? What does He mean by it?

We know that Jesus often prayed for the unsaved (c.f. Luke 23:34), but this moment in John 17 occurred *before* His time on the cross, and I believe

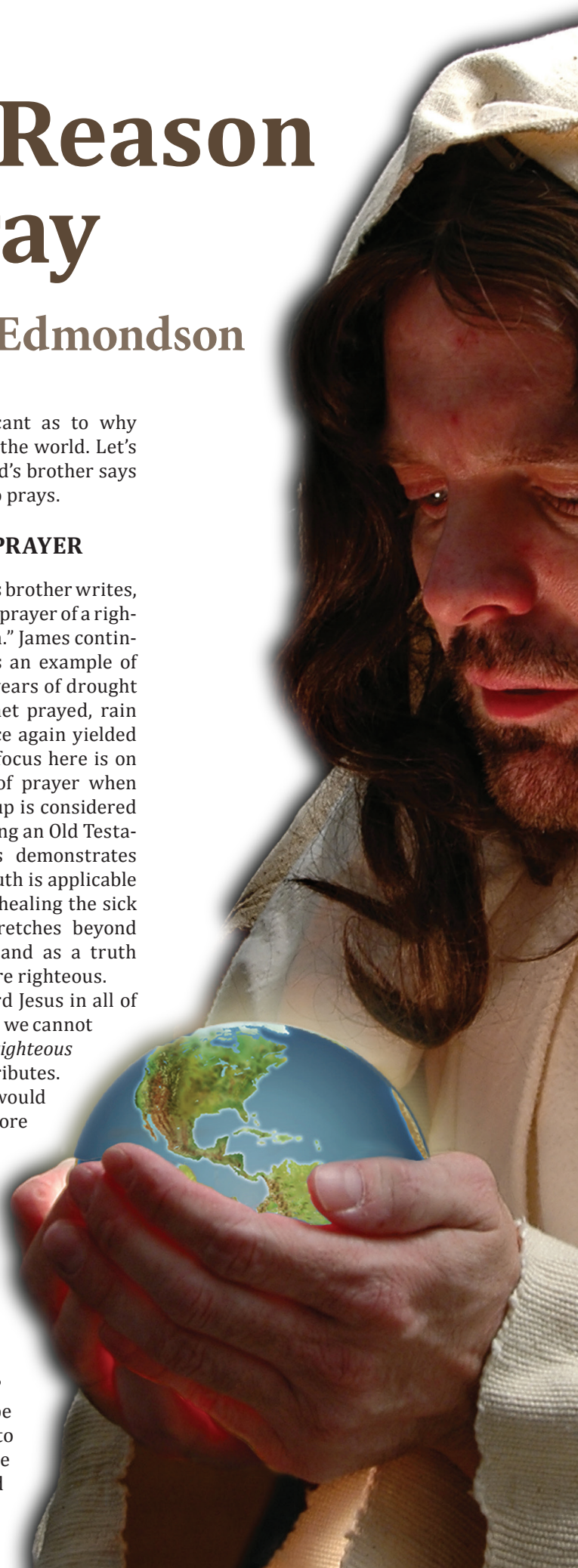
the timing is significant as to why Jesus did not pray for the world. Let's consider what the Lord's brother says regarding the one who prays.

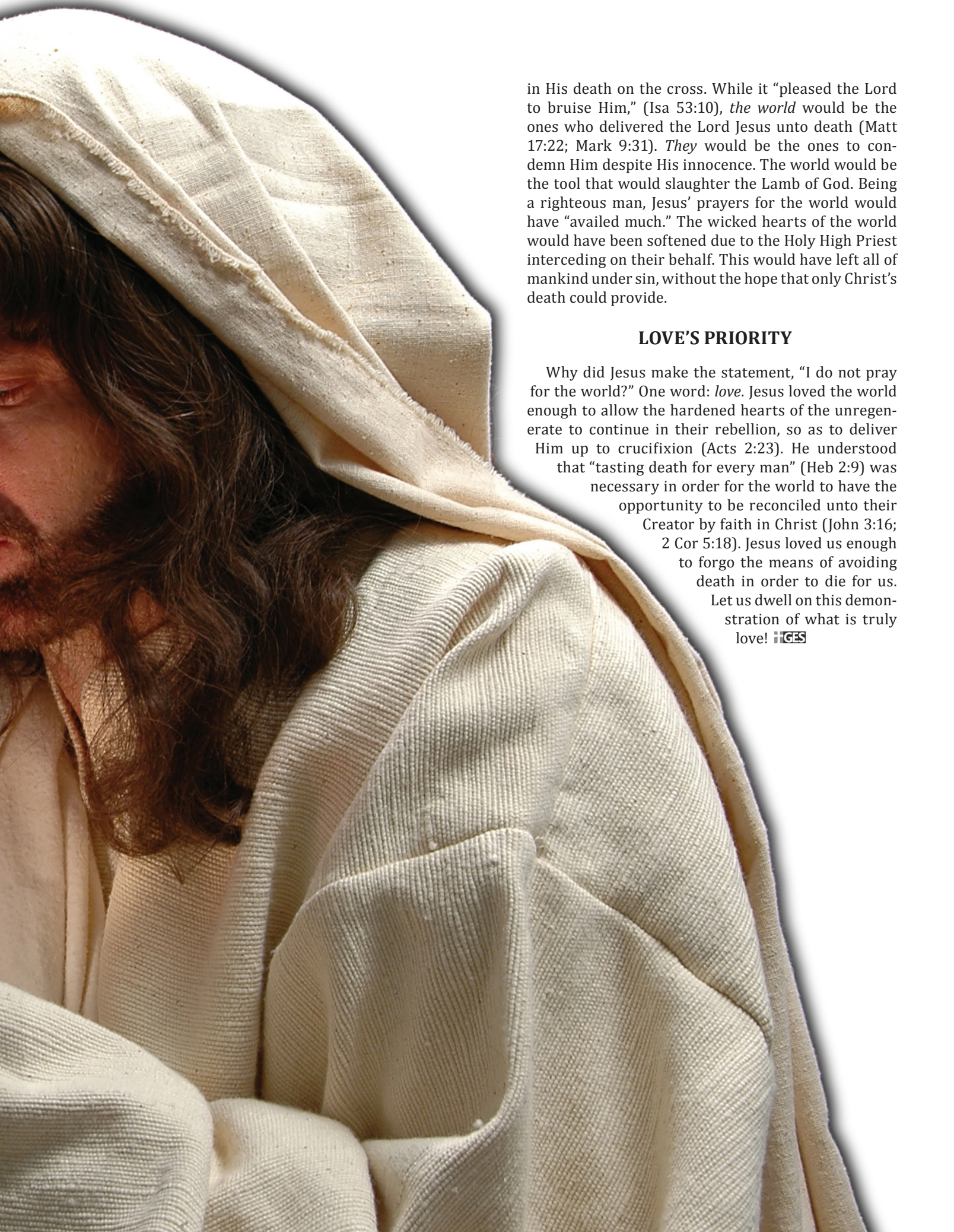
A FERVENT PRAYER

In Jas 5:16, the Lord's brother writes, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much." James continues by using Elijah as an example of this truth. After 3 ½ years of drought in the land the prophet prayed, rain fell, and the earth once again yielded a crop (5:17-18). The focus here is on the effective nature of prayer when the one who offers it up is considered "just" (*dikaaios*). By using an Old Testament example, James demonstrates that this particular truth is applicable for more than simply healing the sick (5:14), and surely stretches beyond the Church Age to stand as a truth concerning any who are righteous.

If we behold the Lord Jesus in all of His splendor and glory, we cannot help but list *just* and *righteous* among His many attributes. Who, when praying, would be considered a more righteous man than our Lord, the sinless Messiah? If there were ever a prayer that would "avail much," it would be the prayer of the Lord Jesus. So why didn't Jesus pray for the world at that moment?

Jesus was about to be unjustly subjected to a series of despicable events that would end






in His death on the cross. While it “pleased the Lord to bruise Him,” (Isa 53:10), *the world* would be the ones who delivered the Lord Jesus unto death (Matt 17:22; Mark 9:31). *They* would be the ones to condemn Him despite His innocence. The world would be the tool that would slaughter the Lamb of God. Being a righteous man, Jesus’ prayers for the world would have “availed much.” The wicked hearts of the world would have been softened due to the Holy High Priest interceding on their behalf. This would have left all of mankind under sin, without the hope that only Christ’s death could provide.

LOVE’S PRIORITY

Why did Jesus make the statement, “I do not pray for the world?” One word: *love*. Jesus loved the world enough to allow the hardened hearts of the unregenerate to continue in their rebellion, so as to deliver Him up to crucifixion (Acts 2:23). He understood that “tasting death for every man” (Heb 2:9) was necessary in order for the world to have the opportunity to be reconciled unto their Creator by faith in Christ (John 3:16; 2 Cor 5:18). Jesus loved us enough to forgo the means of avoiding death in order to die for us.

Let us dwell on this demonstration of what is truly love! 

Are the Sign Gifts Still Valid?



QUESTION:

Recently I read a pamphlet written by Robert Bowman, Jr. The pamphlet included information about visions and claimed that they still exist today, but must point a person to Jesus as well as support the authenticity and reliability of Scripture to be authentic. His source of validation was a quote from the organization, Mission Frontiers, which said that there were a multitude of Muslims who became believers due to dreams they had about Jesus Christ. I've always believed that visions were given to specific people in the Old Testament and to the New Testament apostles. In regards to visions in the New Testament, I thought that this was a sign gift that would cease as soon as it's purpose was complete.

I would appreciate any clarification or a point in the right direction.

—"Dreamer" in SC

ANSWER:

Some see in 1 Cor 13:10 a promise that the gifts of prophecy and tongues (and thus presumably all sign gifts) would cease when the NT (i.e., "the perfect") was complete.

I am not convinced. Most naturally *the perfect* is the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that the verse is saying that by the time Jesus returns those gifts will have been done away with. But it does not say when.

We know from Eph 2:20 that the gifts of apostleship and prophecy ceased in the foundational era of the NT Church, that is, by the death of the last apostle. This may imply that all the sign gifts have ceased.

We know from 2 Tim 4:20 that Paul, who certainly was able to heal people, "left Trophimus sick at Miletus." Why? Many suggest this shows that the gift of healing was already falling out of use during the ministry of the apostles and that it ceased altogether by the death of the last apostle.

Church history shows that the sign gifts were not operative from the time of the apostles until at least the early twentieth century when the modern Charismatic movement began. Yet studies of the modern "sign gifts" show that these do not match the sign gifts in the NT. The dead are not raised. The lame are not healed. The blind are not given sight. The deaf are not made to hear. Current examples of tongues, when recorded and analyzed, are shown not to be languages at all,

but merely a small number of phrases repeated over and over.

This brings us to visions. While many have claimed visions over the past century, the evidence is very thin that any of these visions were genuine.

In my view visions could occur today. I am open, but skeptical, of such claims. I am convinced that visions and other signs will occur, however, during the Tribulation. The two witnesses will perform many signs.

Regarding Muslims coming to faith in Christ via visions, I too have heard this claim. I've heard that this happens in the tens of thousands. Yet I've not heard a single case where the Muslim who comes to "believe in Jesus" says that by faith in Jesus he has everlasting life. Instead I've heard reports of Muslims saying that they are now Muslims who are followers of Jesus. That is, they continue to practice Islam, but they claim love and devotion for Jesus.

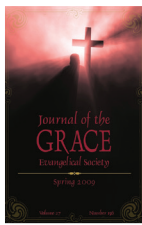
I am open. Maybe the Lord has appeared to people like He appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. But if so, we would expect clear statements like Paul gives in Eph 2:8-9. Absent that, I would doubt the claim was true.

I hope that helps.

Warmly,
Bob Hill



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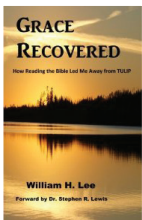
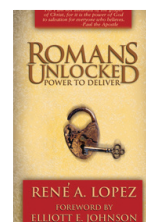
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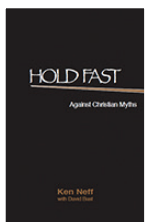
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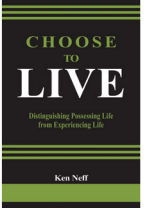
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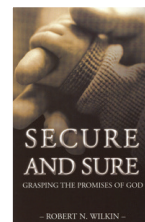
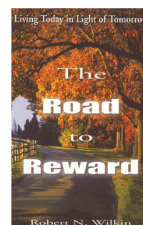
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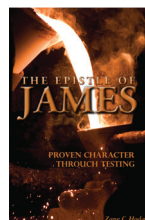
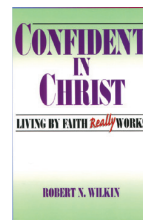
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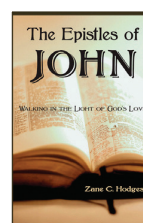
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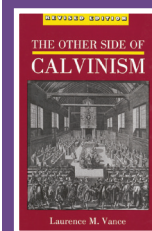
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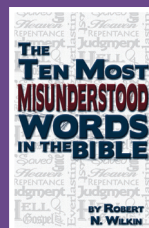
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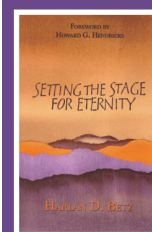
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Triune Love

by S. C. Lazar

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” 1 John 4:7-8 (NKJV)

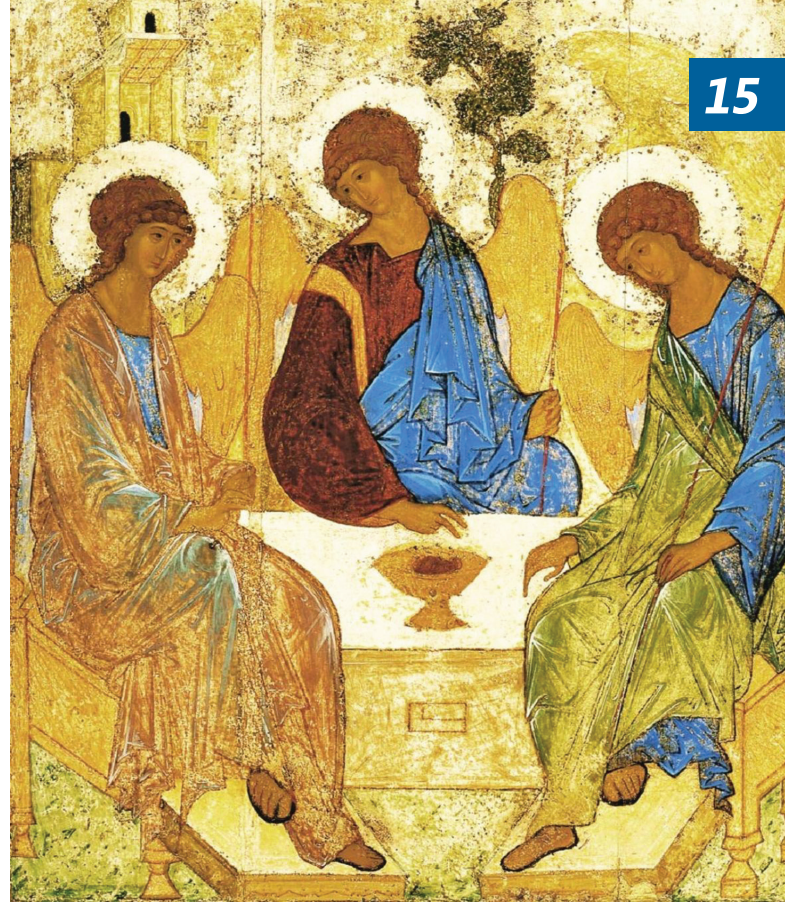
The prominent Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, was once asked why there was a need to believe in the Trinity. His answer was simple: “It is thanks to the Trinity that we can know that God is love.” But how does the Trinity allow us to know that? I think that 1 John 4:8 suggests an answer.

Our God is quite unlike the gods of the nations. Other religious traditions conceive of their gods as remote, distant, and uncaring, somewhat akin to an “unblinking cosmic stare” or “metaphysical iceberg.” Such gods may be powerful (after a fashion), but they also tend to be utterly removed from human concerns, passions, or feelings. Love is beneath them. They are untouched by it. Such gods crave power and worship. But while they may be fearfully revered, loathed, or meekly submitted to by their devotees, they cannot be loved.

But this is not true of the God of Israel, who sent His Son to die for the sins of the world. Israel’s God, the God proclaimed in the gospel, is supremely characterized by love. But to say, as John does, that **love is of God** and that **God is love**, is not simply to describe God’s actions. No, love does not simply describe what God *does*, but what He *is*. God is love. Love is His very being. That God is love *in Himself* is revealed to us by the Holy Trinity.

In the Godhead, there are three divine Persons, but one divine being or substance, such that, God’s very existence is personal communion. The Father eternally begets the Son (John 3:16), and the Spirit proceeds from both Father and Son (John 15:26; 20:22). Not unlike a family, God exists as an eternal interplay of love between the three Divine Persons.

This revelation gives Christians an altogether different understanding of God’s purpose for creation and salvation. The Trinity reveals to us that God did not create the world because He needed something to love, as if, apart from



**That God is
love in Himself is
revealed to us by
the Holy Trinity.**

creation, He was somehow incomplete (as process theologians would say). On the contrary, the world was not created out of God’s need, but out of His abundance, as a dynamic and fertile outpouring of Trinitarian love. The Biblical God populated the world with creatures created in His image

precisely so that they (we) might also live in His likeness, that is, live by responding to, and sharing in, God’s boundless Trinitarian love. Hence, whereas other religions have as their “pillars” impersonal, submissive acts, in Christianity the two greatest commandments that God proclaims are really aspects of a single imperative: to love. Even that command takes a Trinitarian form, for we are called to love

God, and our *neighbor*, just as we love *ourselves* (Matthew 22:37-40).

Although the Trinity is sometimes considered an incomprehensible doctrine better left out of the pulpit, I think the opposite is true. In a world where marriages, families, and other social ties are increasingly coming apart, where people seem incapable of forming lasting bonds of love, and where popular culture leaves us without living examples of what loving relationships should look like, the doctrine of the Trinity is like balm to the soul. In the light of everlasting Trinitarian love, we can discern our own purpose, namely, to live in *shalom* with others, as receptacles of God’s love, filled to the brim until we can say “my cup runneth over.”

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