



GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

July 2009

FREE!

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God's Muscles

CHRIST ALONE • GRACE ALONE • FAITH ALONE • SCRIPTURE ALONE

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EDITORIAL . . .

"So if the lord gave them the same gift as he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:17)

This scripture takes us back to the beginnings of Christianity. Peter, a new Christian and a Jew, has been to a Gentile home and eaten food with its owner. Jews were taught to protect themselves from ritual uncleanness by strict avoidance of unclean foods. Gentiles had no such food laws. It was taken for granted that being in a Gentile home, and especially taking food from his table, would make a person unclean. It went without saying that Gentiles were themselves unclean for more reasons than mere food. To eat with a Gentile was to compromise one's relationship with God.

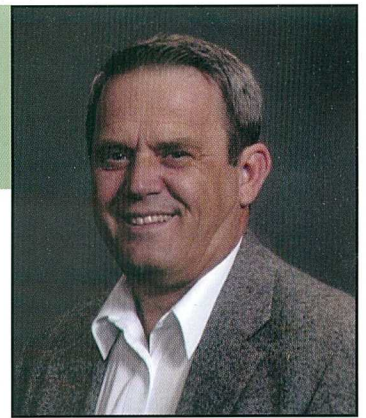
Peter was deeply affected because he had been led by the Spirit of Jesus to do this very thing. While in Cornelius' home, Peter had preached the gospel to him and the Spirit had come upon everyone present. That was when Peter realized: *"They (Gentiles) have received the Holy Spirit just as we have"* (Acts 10:47). As a result, Peter came to believe that he should not withhold Christian fellowship from anyone to whom God had given his Spirit. *"Who was I to think that I could oppose God?"*

All Christians must permit

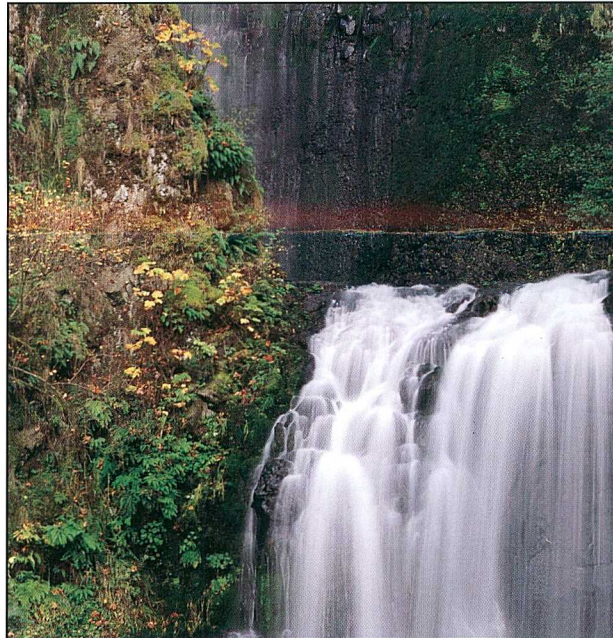
themselves to be interrogated by Peter's question. To whom does God give his Spirit—besides us? Peter discovered it as a fact he could not dismiss: God gives himself to all kinds of people; even to some whom we would not consider worthy.

The gospel informs us that God is way ahead of us in 'good will to all men.' His infinite kindness does not flow from him in response to certain ones who deserve more in this thing or that. Rather, it gushes from inexhaustible wellsprings of generosity within him. This is what 'grace' means. God is good to human beings because that is his inclination. No one attracts or entices his gifts out of him. No one has any claim on his goodness. Peter is not accepted by God because he is a Jew, and Cornelius is not rejected because he is a Gentile. Both are pure in God's sight because of his grace.

If Christians would wholeheartedly follow God's lead in this, the effect on the church and the world would be considerable. Are there people, different to you, whom you have not yet accepted as your equal, as brother and sister? Perhaps they come from a different religious tradition than you; they look, speak, eat and dress in a manner that are foreign to you. In our relationships with all men—no matter who they are—let God be our model and our inspiration.



Pastor Ron Allen



GOOD NEWS *Unlimited*

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GOD'S MUSCLES

By Ron Allen

Early 20th century English psychologist, Anthony Storr, has said, “When men divide the world into good and evil, into sheep and goats, what happens to the goats is usually horrible.”

While it is essential in any society to isolate some individuals to prevent their harming others, it is equally damaging when persons, classes, races, nations, political parties or religious denominations come to believe that the flaws and weaknesses of men and women in general are not present in their group. Great injury results when some believe that it is not necessary for them to submit to the same moral scrutiny as outsiders; that somehow they do not need to be examined.

I watched a TV reality program called “Border Control.” The show observed Customs and Immigration officials at their task in various international airports. Two men were called aside and asked to open their large suitcases. They refused, citing their citizenship. When the officer persisted, the two travelers spoke with raised voices and showed signs of being aggrieved. They could not believe that a citizen re-entering his country could be so humiliated as to be ordered to open his baggage for inspection. The officer

remained composed but firm. “Do you think it is only foreigners who breach our border protection laws?” he asked. “Open your suitcase!”

This relatively benign airport melodrama illustrates an attitude with destructive consequences if left unchecked. Sociologists speak about the phenomenon of ‘triumphalism’—the idea that one’s own culture or system is superior to all others. Triumphalism blinds its constituents to the merits of other collectives. It impairs the insider’s ability to form a just and true view of his own behavior.

For a contemporary illustration of this concept, we need only refer to the unfolding tragedy in Gaza. Rockets fired into Southern Israel from Gaza over a period of years, kill five, six, even a dozen people. The State of Israel rightly condemns this hostile barrage, calling it the work of terrorists and cold-blooded murderers. There is talk of reprisal.

Sure enough, a blistering invasion of Gaza is launched. The Palestinian enclave is hammered from earth and sky for weeks. Soon, a thousand people are dead; a third of them innocent civilians. Those who prosecute the invasion are heralded by

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“When men divide the world into good and evil, into sheep and goats, what happens to the goats is usually horrible.”

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Israel as patriots; their casualties, the noble dead. Killed Palestinians are not so characterized; their death is somehow less grievous than the death of an Israeli citizen. A thousand dead Palestinians in response to twenty or thirty Israelis killed, is defended as a just balance!

Other notable instances of triumphalism at work in history include examples of slavery, genocide, Apartheid in South Africa, European Colonialism, the Manifest Destiny doctrine in North America and much religious intolerance and persecution.

Humans have a native tendency to 'tribal altruism.' In love to her child, a mother will sacrifice herself. She is less likely to do the same for someone else's child. Within the strict limits of blood and soil, people can be amazingly generous to family and friends while showing cold-hearted intolerance to strangers.

Now and then an individual comes along who discovers the ethical vigor to value another person's existence as much as his own. Though this happens most commonly within the boundaries of a particular grouping, when it does happen, it is acknowledged as high-order behavior.

The fact that unselfish service can be so admired *within* communities should tell us that much evil might be eliminated if all the world's clans and cliques started to believe that they really belonged to the same tribe after all; that they really were part of one big family.

Sorokin, the famous 20th century sociologist, wrote:

*If unselfish love is confined within one group, a given family, tribe, nation, race, religious denomination, political party, trade union, caste, social class or any part of humanity, such **in-group** altruism tends to generate an **out-group** antagonism. And the more intense and exclusive the **in-group** solidarity of its members, the more unavoidable are the clashes between that group and the rest of humanity.*

*Herein lies the tragedy of tribal altruism not extended over the whole of mankind, or over everyone and all. An **exclusive** love of one's own group makes its members indifferent or even aggressive towards other groups and outsiders.*

-Sorokin. THE TRAGEDY AND
TRANSCENDANCE OF TRIBAL ALTRUISM.

The great need of the world is for its populations to discover a spirituality that is chiefly expressed in recognition of the worth of other persons and groups as centers of value—simply because they exist. As populations increase and the planet becomes more crowded, it is increasingly obvious that in order to even survive, human beings must move up from their narrow parochialism to 'good will to all men.' The one inevitable alternative is a steady drift into incipient violence in the form of prejudice, suspicion, accusation, and hatred, that sooner or later matures into bloodshed and holocaust.

In view of our pressing need to be captured and inspired by a conception of the essential unity of mankind, we turn to the Bible; a rich source for just such an idea.

At least twice in the book of Amos, Israel's election by God is cited. God came to an obscure people when they were in a weakened and degraded state. He took this forlorn band and made them his. He redeemed them and proceeded to teach them many things about himself.

The privileged relationship Israel enjoyed with her Redeemer is the backdrop to Amos' anguished recital of her complacency, corruption, and cruelty. There is something abhorrent in Israel's refusal to model the values of God; values he revealed in his redeeming them from slavery. The grating dissonance caused by Israel's behavior lies back of statements like these:

"I brought you out of Egypt and led you forty years in the desert" (Amos 2:10).

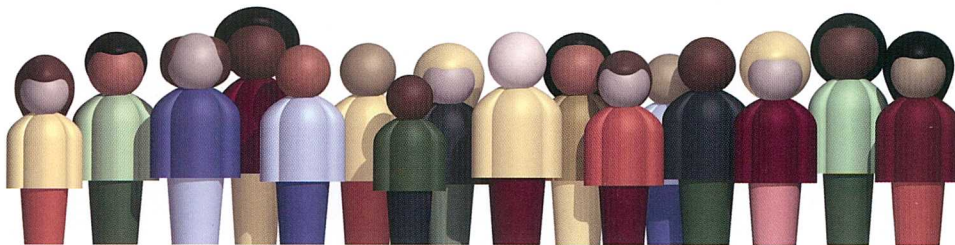
"Hear this word the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel—against the whole family I brought up out of Egypt. You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins" (3:1, 2).

"Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings for forty years in the desert, O house of Israel? You have lifted up the shrine of your king, the pedestal of your idols, the star of your god—which you made for yourselves" (5:25, 26).

Each of these solemn utterances acknowledges God's historic connection with Israel—and her recalcitrance. But toward the end of his prophecy, Amos adds a keener edge to his indictments.

"Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?" declares the Lord. "Did I not bring Israel up from Egypt, the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?" (9:7)

Three nations are named, and we are told where they came from. Israel came out of Egypt. Her longtime enemy, the Philistines, came from Caphtor (Crete). →



...they really were part of one big family.

Arameans (or Syrians) came from Kir, a place of uncertain whereabouts.

God's sponsorship of Israel is affirmed, but Amos goes further to say that Israel is not the only human grouping in whose history God is involved. The God of Israel is also God over other nations. He is the active cause of other racial migrations, people movements, and political developments. *"The Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes"* (Daniel 4:32).

From the very first, God had taught Israel that his interests extended to all the peoples of the earth. Israel gave a weak nod to this idea, but certainly refrained from wholeheartedly embracing it. This should not surprise us, for we are the same. We tend to side with our children and overlook faults in them that we would not tolerate in other people's kids. When the referee penalizes the visiting team, we praise him for doing such a good job; when he penalizes the home team we berate him for being prejudiced. We admit that God probably cares about other nations and cultures, but we really know that he cares about us most of all!! We know He tolerates those who don't attend our church, that He is patient with their wacky ideas; but of course we know that he would love them more if they were to come over to us and be like us. After all, God is *mainly* with us, isn't he?! At the deepest levels of our psyche, we look for a God to underwrite these instincts. History shows how easily religion (Christianity included) can be conscripted for nationalist, denominationalist and racist ideals. (Witness white supremacists rallying under the banner of the cross.)

The Bible bears witness to the drama of God's action in history, but that action is always *against* the flow of our instincts; *against* the thrust of our prejudice. In Amos 9:7, three ethnic groupings that briefly occupy history's stage are named: Israel, Philistia and the Arameans. God is the sovereign player in all three.

An Israelite, hearing Amos, might object saying, "Yes, God has dealings with those other nations, but not like he does with us; we are his favorite. As if in anticipation of this rejoinder, God says: *"Are not you Israelites the same to me as the Cushites?"* The Cushites lived somewhere in Northern Africa. They were a long way from Israel; they were not involved with Israel in anyway. Indeed, their very remoteness from Israel is the reason why they are mentioned. God seems to be saying:

You men and women of Israel think that you are a cut above the other nations. You think that because of my

historic involvement with you, that I am eternally on your side, even when you care nothing about me or my ways. You believe that when I come to judge the nations, they will be measured with standard that does not apply to you. You speak about the Day of the Lord as if it will be a day of triumph for you. It won't be (see 5:18-20). It will be a day of darkness, without a ray of brightness for you. You are the same to me as the Cushites.

Yes, God did choose a people. But that reveals special things about God, not Israel. In his dealings with Abraham's descendants, God is seen as merciful, compassionate, faithful, longsuffering, maintaining love, forgiving wickedness and sin, holy, just, true. God used Israel to reveal himself, but Scripture does not encourage us to believe that there is anything extraordinary about Israel. She is not more deserving, more agreeable, or more desirable than other people. In her epic

story, Israel does *not* open a spiritual account with God in which a righteous capital accumulates. The nation does not become rich in moral credit to a point at which God is not so much a Savior as a partner; so that whereas Israel once needed God desperately, now God needs Israel. No! This is not what happens at all.

Once, God redeemed the children of Israel. He did this because he chose to; because of his prior love for them. It was his free act. Now, in the time of Amos, after hundreds of years of living in that great redemption, Israel's people seem to believe that God has lost some of his freedom. They think that God has mortgaged himself to them so that no matter what they do, no matter how they behave, even

if they pour contempt on the very values that made them God's chosen in the first place, he will never move against them. *"Disaster will not overtake us"* (9:10).

But this is terribly wrong. God owes Israel nothing. They are no more deserving than any other nation. They have accumulated no moral stocks. The lesson Amos urges upon his people in the 8th century B.C. is remarkably similar to Paul's exposition of the gospel in his Roman letter. In the first chapter, he describes the pagan world and accuses it of guilt before God by reason of its rejection of decency and love of evil. In chapter two, he confronts Judaism of the 1st century—a Judaism that agrees with his assessment of the Gentile world. Then he says to his fellow Jews, *"You therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning*

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yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things” (Romans 2:1).

As in Amos’ time, Jewish nationals were possessed of the idea that the divine order would be set aside in their case, for their benefit. “If that is what you think, you have misunderstood the meaning of God’s involvement with you,” argues Paul. “*Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance, and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance?*” (Romans 2:4). “God’s intention was that his kindness would produce repentance—not in others—but in you.”

The first half of Amos 9 lands a blow on an Israel bloated with spiritual pride (9:8). But toward the chapter’s end there is a change of mood. The storm of judgment passes and God seems to reconsider. “*In that day I will restore David’s fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name*” (Amos 9:11, 12).

First, unrelieved gloom and doom; then an outburst of hope. When both these emphases are taken seriously and held together in creative tension, the foundation for a beautiful religion takes shape.

That Israel is no different to the Cushites means God insists on his freedom. Israel has no special leverage with God. He is not obliged to be her sponsor.

So God judges his own people and sends them into exile. But he is still free to exercise his kindness, and so he moves to restore the kingdom of David. To build it the way it used to be: a nation that lives to celebrate—not itself, or its supposed superiority—but the grace of God.

No matter how long a person has been a Christian, that person never gets any control over God. God maintains his freedom. If my church, my organization, our institution, fails to tell the truth about God, he can shut it down; bring it to nothing. And, if he chooses, he can raise it again from its ruins. God’s actions in the world say nothing about the relative worth of those whom he chooses to redeem. His saving actions are donated, not earned.

I was one of six kids. We were a blended family, pretty close to one another in age. There were three boys and three girls. We used to compare our muscles. Raucous scenes would sometimes erupt around the family dinner table when one would call out, “look at my muscle,” and he or she would strain to produce maximum



...no matter who they are or what they are like.

flexing. This would only encourage everyone (not mother) to demonstrate muscular supremacy. Each flexing would be followed by howls of derision, with remarks like: “That’s not a muscle; it’s a sparrow’s ankle.” Or, “Where is it? I can’t see it. Are you flexing it yet?” And so on. We all wanted very much to be superior, even if only with our muscles.

Then Dad—who happened to have enormous arms—would tell us to be quiet. Then he would roll up his sleeve, bend his arm and put his thumb in his mouth as he pretended to ‘inflate’ his bicep. You should have seen how big that thing was! We were in awe of dad’s muscles.




We used to compare our muscles.

After that display we would cease muscle competition for a while. There didn’t seem to be any point. The size of our skinny arms relative to each other seemed a poor sort of comparison to be making, given that we lived with a father who had a pair of such splendid biceps. You might say that there was an unspoken, satisfied consensus that we felt lucky to have a dad with muscles like that. There was a kind of delight; a joy and kinship in knowing that we all benefited equally from dad’s great strength.

Yes, God is surpassingly wonderful. His character so exceeds all measure that it is vain and ludicrous for any group to try to excise themselves from the common herd.

Here then is a foundation of a religion for our time; one that focuses on a God who loves in such cosmic proportions that arrogant posturing between different human groupings is cancelled. A God, whose generosities are so broad and free-flowing that pretentious comparisons are excluded.

Here is the cornerstone of a spirituality that—far from endorsing our instinctive triumphalism—propels us in the opposite direction; urging us to abandon tribal altruisms for the love of God, freely lavished on all men, no matter who they are or what they are like. 

OF JEWELS AND PASTE

H. E. Fosdick

Jesus may have felt as he did about privileged people because a man occupying a favored position is almost irresistibly tempted to estimate himself on the basis of that, regardless of the kind of man he is inside. It is extraordinarily difficult for a privileged person to get a true view of himself. A favored place gives us standing, frontage, and setting for our lives. It furnishes us with a show window on the street for all to see. And almost inevitable, a man is tempted to think of himself in terms of *that* when his privilege may be merely and extraneous inheritance and acquisition, not truly representative of what he really is.

James M. Barrie depicted this truth dramatically in his play,

The Admirable Crichton. The scene shifts from London with its rankings and discriminations of social class, to a shipwrecked company on a South Sea island, where all special favors are stripped away, and the persons of the drama depend each on his own quality. What is a man worth now in himself? As it turns out, it is not the lord, but the butler who is the real man—far and away the real man.

The lord and his daughters had been getting by on something extraneous to their intrinsic quality. When a man is habitually set in the jewelry of circumstance, he almost irresistibly comes to think that he must be a jewel, when in fact he may be paste.


The protection furnished by an advantageous situation against true self-appraisal and self-judgment, troubled Jesus in the Pharisees, and it would trouble

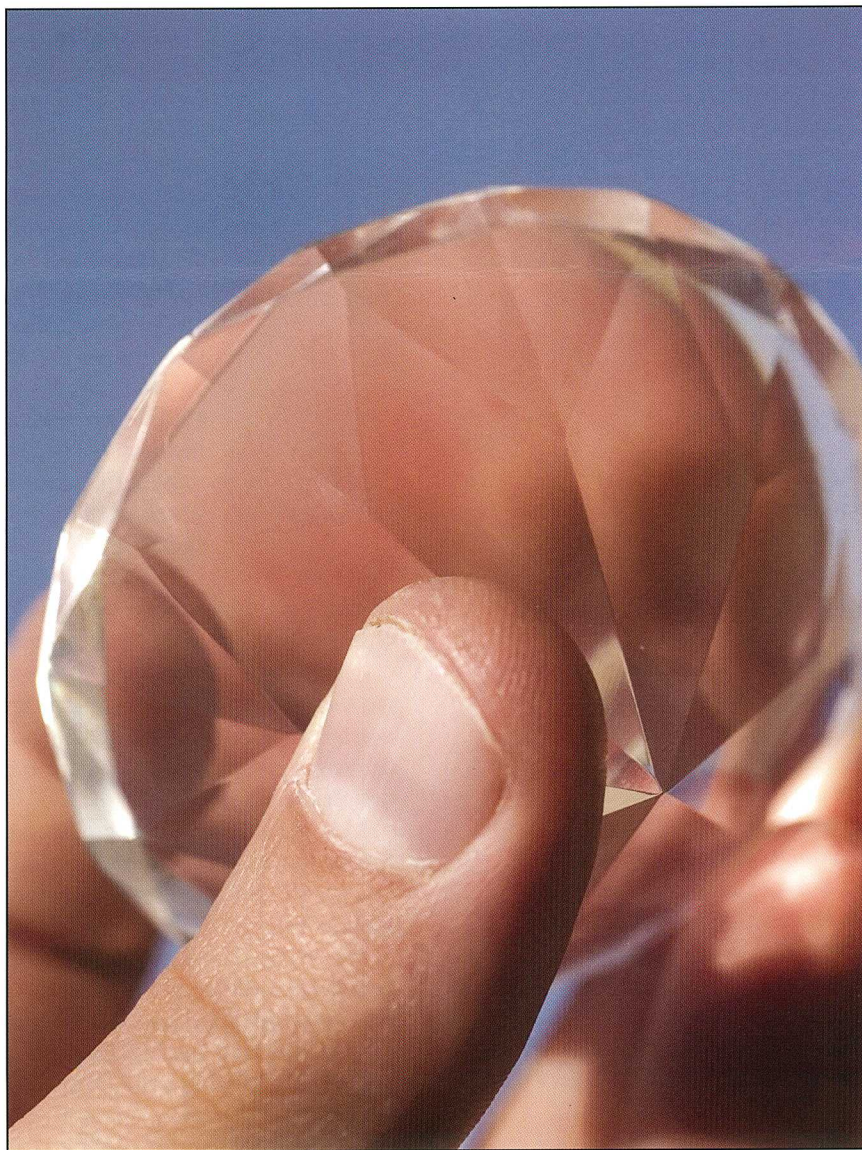
him in us. The Pharisees had the marks of honor and prestige belonging to their class. They were set in jewelry and thought themselves jewels. That is why Jesus called them hypocrites, not so much because they were consciously trying to deceive others, as because they were so deceived about themselves....

You see, we are pleading for the Christian virtue of humility on the part of the privileged, and it is not easy to plead for. Privilege does not naturally lead to humility. Favored folk are almost inevitably tempted to think that their privilege is something they have earned, that they deserve it, that it is an outward and visible sign of their superiority.

Most of our privilege is not of our earning. Take out of the situation the sacrifices of generations before we were born, the background of our nation, the contribution of our families, what came to us because we were born where we happened to be born, and how little is left of our privilege that we earned ourselves alone. Most of our privilege is a gift. Privilege is something to be humble about.

Especially we need to be humble about what it commonly does to us, how it builds walls around us so that we are shut out from the understanding of our fellows, how it hardens our hearts when we do not know it, so that we do not feel what life means to some people, how it blinds our eyes to the real significance of the social movements of our time.

-H.E. Fosdick.
SUCCESSFUL
CHRISTIAN LIVING,
pp. 139-144. 



Most of our privilege is not of our earning.

To God Be The Glory

By James S. Stewart

"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Here is a contrast of the most dramatic kind. Treasure, in earthen vessels. It is not fitting that anyone should enclose a lovely picture in a tawdry frame. That would clearly be all wrong. Yet this, Paul sees, is precisely what God has done.

There is the startling contrast: on the one side, the magnificence of divine grace; on the other, the worthlessness of the human hearts in which the grace is lodged. Such an immense and shining splendor entrusted to such poor, pathetic, broken instruments; such an infallible truth committed to very fallible men; such an amazing gospel committed to such an ordinary church.

Somewhere there must be a reason for the shattering discrepancy. And Paul searches for that purpose. There is indeed a purpose, and it is this: to let the world see that Christianity cannot ever be accounted for by anything in man or his institutions, cannot possibly be explained by any human skill or virtue or prowess or ability; for any such explanation is manifestly ludicrous. Hence, it follows that the explanation must be in God. *"We have this treasure in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us!"*

"We have this treasure." That is Paul's evaluation. Is it ours? Do we realize that the gospel—the old familiar gospel—is prodigious wealth, the most incomparable of blessings? Or do we look at Paul as a man rhapsodizing and growing rhetorical about very little?

I know where Paul borrowed this metaphor. He borrowed it directly from Jesus. Jesus spoke about the fascination of the quest for treasure. He spoke of the dealer in precious stones who spent his life traveling across land and sea to enrich his collection; and how one day in the diamond market he suddenly saw before him the most perfect pearl; and how he went and sold his whole collection to possess himself of that one priceless jewel. That, said Jesus, is what it means to find the kingdom of God. Do we believe it? Does religion mean anything like that for us?

Just consider: What does our faith offer? It comes to one man, miserably aware that he has lost grip and broken faith, beginning to wonder if life is worth living. It comes to such a one and says—"Courage! Here is God's renewal, this very day, for you: the past obliterated!"

It comes to a woman, weary and out of heart with drudgery and disappointment and anxiety. It brings incredibly good

tidings of tension vanquished by serenity. It comes to this confused, chaotic, bewildered world, and it tells of the entrance into history of a force of immeasurable range which can literally add to life a new dimension, transforming the whole human prospect. No wonder the New Testament throbs with excitement from end to end. No wonder Paul clamors and stammers about "unsearchable riches" and "unspeakable gifts." *"We have this treasure!"*

Seeing the disproportion between the treasure and the vessel, a well-meaning Christian seeks to reduce the disproportion, to narrow the gap. In other words, he says, "Let us make a vessel that will not be earthy. Let us produce a church so efficacious that it will represent Christ adequately, strong enough to be equal to its task, confident enough to be commensurate with its world commission."

Far be it from me to decry strength and efficiency in religion. But the danger is that we should put our trust in prowess and efficiency, as though the church were to be sufficient for God rather than that should be God sufficient for the church. For when we do that, we cut off the church's power at the source.

The Pharisee in the temple was a very model of religious strength and efficiency. His religion was really most impressive. But the true church was not there in that man's bold, brash confidence before God. It was in the uneasy conscience and the stammering contrition of the publican, who bowed his head and repented in dust and ashes.

The fact we have to reckon with is that the church's strength is never going to be equal to the task. Thank God for that! The very fact that there is such a frightening disparity is the hidden secret of the church's power. God forbid we should be misled by the naive and callow supposition that when the church becomes great and imposing, the kingdom of heaven is coming near. You have only to read history to know that that is not true.

Men once thought they could erect a church so imposing that its top would reach heaven, but God flung down that Tower of Babel and scattered across the earth those who had tried to build it.

Our text resolves its paradox in another attitude: **to recognize a divine purpose in the disparity between the treasure and the vessel. The incongruity is intended.** The treasure has been put into an earthen vessel, not by mistake, not because nothing better was available. It has been put there deliberately. It is upon human weakness, not strength, that God chooses to build his kingdom.

-James. S. Stewart. KING FOREVER, pp. 17-23. 



GOD IN A BOX

By J.B. Phillips

The man who is outside all organized Christianity may have, and often does have, a certain reverence for God and a certain genuine respect for Jesus Christ. But what sticks in his throat about the Christianity of the churches is not merely their differences in denomination, but the spirit of 'churchliness' that seems to pervade them all. They seem to him to have captured, and tamed, and trained to their own liking; something that is really far too big ever to be forced into little man-made boxes with neat labels on them.

"If" the churches appear to be saying to him, "you will jump through our particular hoop or sign on our particular dotted line then we will introduce you to God. But if not, then there's no God for you." This seems to him to be nonsense, and nasty, arrogant nonsense at that. "If there's a God at all," he feels rather angrily; then he's here in the home and in the street, here in the pub, and in the workshop. And, if it is true that he's interested in me and wants me to love and serve him, then he's available for me (and every other Tom, Dick or Harry who wants him) without any interference from the professionals....

If the churches give the outsider the impression that God works almost exclusively through the machinery they have erected and damns all other machinery that does not bear their label, then they cannot be surprised if he (the person outside of organized Christianity) finds their version of God cramped and inadequate, and refuses to join their union....


All Christians, whatever their church, would of course repudiate the idea that their god was a super example of their own denomination. Nevertheless, beneath the conscious critical level of the mind, it is possible for the Anglo Catholic to conceive God as particularly pleased with Anglo-Catholicism, doubtful about Evangelicalism, and frankly displeased with all forms of nonconformity. The Roman Catholic who asserts positively that ordination of the Anglican Church is invalid is plainly worshipping a God who is a Roman Catholic.... The tragedy of these examples, which could be reproduced *ad nauseum*, is not difference of opinion, but the outrageous folly and damnable sin of trying to regard God as the Party leader of a particular point of view....

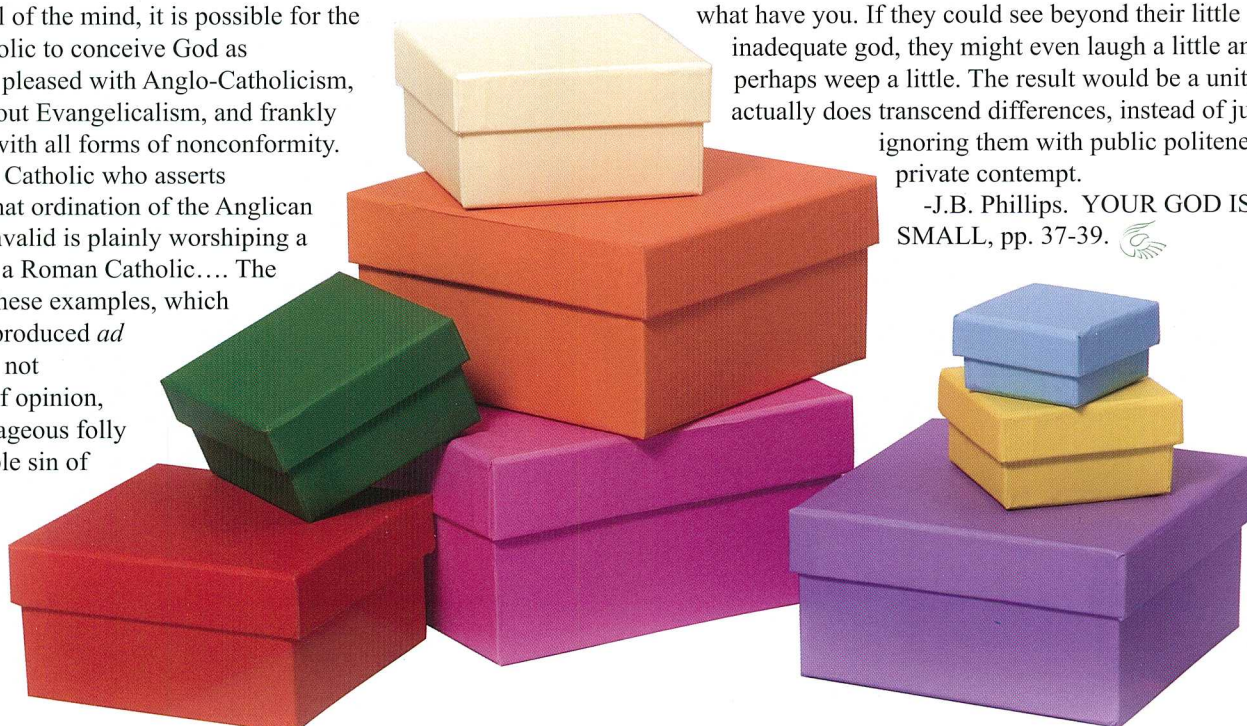
It is quite plain to the disinterested observer that the real God takes no notice of the 'boxes.' "*The wind bloweth where it listeth*" and is subject to no regulation of man.

Moreover, our thoughtful observer who is outside the churches has done a good deal of thinking on his own. The discoveries of modern physical and biological science, of astronomy, and of psychology, have profoundly influenced his conception of the 'size' of God. If there be a mind behind the immense complexities of the phenomena that Man can observe, then it is that of a Being, tremendous in his power and wisdom. It is emphatically not that of a little god. It is perfectly conceivable that such a Being has a moral purpose which is being worked out on the stage of this small planet. It is even possible to believe that God deliberately reduced himself to the stature of humanity in order to visit the earth in person, as all Christians affirm. But the sort of thing which outrages reason and sets Sanity rocking on her seat is to be told that such a God can only operate where there is an unbroken succession of Bishops!

The 'outsider' who knows nothing of the mixture of tradition, conviction, honest difference, and hidden resentment that lies behind the divisions of the Christian churches sees clearly the advantages of a united Christian front, and cannot see why the churches cannot 'get together.'

The problem is doubtless complicated, for there are many honest differences held with equal sincerity, it is only made *insoluble* because the different demonstrations are imagining God to be Roman or Anglican or Baptist or Presbyterian or what have you. If they could see beyond their little inadequate god, they might even laugh a little and perhaps weep a little. The result would be a unity that actually does transcend differences, instead of just ignoring them with public politeness and private contempt.

-J.B. Phillips. YOUR GOD IS TOO SMALL, pp. 37-39. 



NO BRAGGING IN HEAVEN

C. H. Spurgeon

“So do we have anything to brag about? Bragging has been eliminated. On what basis was it eliminated? On the basis of our own efforts? No, indeed! Rather, it is eliminated on the basis of faith”
(Romans 3:27).

I cannot consider that because one Christian has been more devoted to Christ than another, therefore there will be an eternal difference, for this is to introduce works. I think we can serve God from some other motive than that base of one trying to be greater than our brothers in heaven. If I should get to heaven at all, I do not care who is greater than I am, for if any one shall have more happiness in heaven than I shall, then I shall have more happiness too....

If any of you can have brighter places in heaven, and more happiness, and joy than I, I will be glad to know it. The prospect does not excite any envy in my soul now, or if it did now, it would certainly not then—for I should feel that the more you had the more I should have. Even on earth the saints had *all things common* when they were in a heavenly state, and I am persuaded they will have all things common when they are in glory. I do not believe in *gentlemen* in heaven and the *poor* Christians behind the door. I believe that our union with each other will be so great that distinctions will be utterly lost.

I do believe that Boasting (bragging) is shut out there. But I think that if there were those degrees in glory, Boasting would at least get his tail in. If it did not insinuate its whole body, it would at least get some of its unhallowed members over the

wall, whereas the text says it is excluded. It does not say, “Boasting, you are allowed to come in and sit on the floor.” No, shut the door and do not let him in at all.

“But let me in,” he says, “and I will be quiet.” No, shut him out altogether.


“But at least let me put my foot in.” No, exclude him—shut him out altogether.

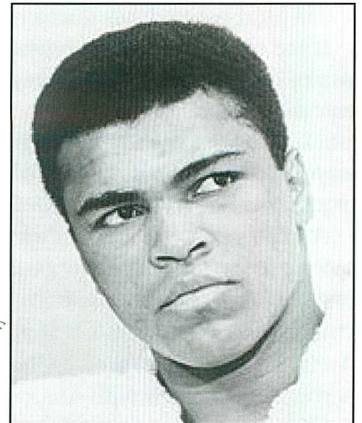
“But at least let me sometimes go in and out.” No, shut him out altogether. Exclude him. Bolt the door. Put double padlocks on it. Say, once and for all, ‘Boasting, get you gone. You are hurled down and broken in pieces; you shall be driven away with shame.’ It is excluded. It cannot be let in, in any sense, in any term, in any degree.

Let me state this truth of God broadly, that the ignorant may catch it. There is one gate to heaven for the most chaste and the most debauched. When we come to God, the best of us can bring nothing and the worst of us can bring no less.

Two men have fallen overboard. One man has a dirty face and the other a clean one.

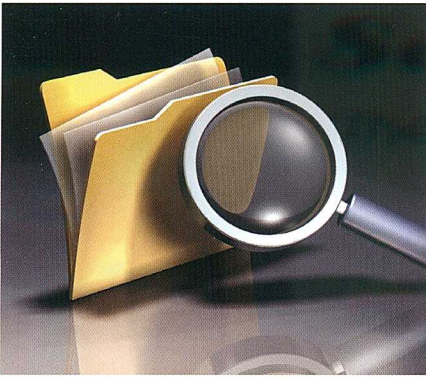
There is a rope thrown over from the stern of the vessel and only that rope will save the sinking men—whether their faces are fair or foul. Do I therefore underrate cleanliness? Certainly not—but it will not save a drowning man!

-www.spurgeongems.org 



“I am the greatest!”

“Thus says the Lord: ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this: that he understands and knows me; that I am the Lord that practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight,’ declares the Lord”
(Jeremiah 9:23-25).



Scripture Search...

"These are the Scriptures that testify about me..."

God's Muscles

Introduction:

Though human beings are diverse in race, color, culture, opinion and religion, their similarities are nevertheless obvious and profound. Therefore, the need for different groups to live in mutual regard for one other is urgent and vital.

Unremitting wars with their accompanying horrors and grief proclaim our failure to match this ideal. One thing is certain: atheism has not, and will not, advance us toward the goal. What is needed is widely-held belief in a God who loves all people equally.

*All the relations in which human beings afford one another mutual support always rest on the fact that God sustains them all, because he is the ultimate Thou of them all. All true relations between human beings are sustained by the principle teneo quia teneor: **I hold because I am held.***

-Karl Heim. CHRISTIAN FAITH AND SCIENCE.

*Once upon a time there was a peasant woman, and a very wicked woman she was. And she died and did not leave a single good deed behind. The devils caught her and plunged her into the lake of fire. So her guardian angel stood and wondered what good deed of hers he could remember to tell God; "she once pulled up an onion in her garden," said she, "and gave it to a beggar woman."
And God answered, "You take that onion then, and hold it out to her in the lake, and let her take hold and be pulled out. And if you can pull her out of the lake, let her come to Paradise, but if the onion breaks, then the woman must stay where she is."*

The angel ran to the woman and held out the onion to her. "Come," he said, "catch hold and I'll pull you out." And he began cautiously pulling her out.

He had just pulled her right out when the other sinners in the lake, seeing how she was being drawn out, began catching hold of her so as to be pulled out with her. But she was a very wicked woman and began kicking them. "I'm to be pulled out, not you. It's my onion, not yours." As soon as she said that the onion broke.

-Fyodor Dostovesky. THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV.

Read: Amos chapter 9

- Compare the following: Amos 2:10-16; Amos 3:1-2; Amos 4:10-12; Jonah 3:10-4:11.
- Unto what purpose did God choose Abraham and his descendants? See: Genesis 12:1-3; Isaiah 42:1-4, 5, 6.
- How did Jesus highlight the universal nature of God's love? Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 10:25-37; Matthew 11:20-24.

Read: Ezekiel 36:22, 23; Daniel 9:17-19.

What is the great reason and ground for God's intervening in human affairs?

Can that basis be moderated by faith and obedience to God? See: Romans 1:17, 18; Romans 2:1-4; Romans 4:13-16; Romans 10:1-3. Compare Matthew 20:1-16.

Conclusion:

Forgive us our virtues
As we forgive those who are virtuous against us.
-Chad Walsh.

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RELIGION IS DANGEROUS

By Desmond Ford

A few years ago I came back from Russia. The marks of religion are everywhere in that country. Not the Christian religion, but the religion of Lenin. As soon as the first Communist dictator died, Stalin had him deified. Statues were erected everywhere and photographs were multiplied like the leaves of autumn. I had heard about the pulling down of Lenin's statue in one or two places. But there are plenty left. I could never avoid Lenin. He was watching me all the time, always with the same look on his face, striving to express both wisdom and benevolence, but not entirely convincing Christian skeptics.

Like every visitor to Moscow, I ultimately ended up at the Kremlin. And there is Lenin's mausoleum. I won't forget it—not because of the impressiveness of the little stretched-out midget man, looking like an exhibit at Madame Tussaud's—but because I had to pay eleven rubles to park my camera before descending the steps of the mausoleum, in company with a long line of tourists. I was obviously not allowed to photograph the Russian god. No need to. He was everywhere—as I said, ubiquitous as well as iniquitous.

The Russians couldn't dispense with religion. They had to have one, and Lenin won the popularity poll among the politicians. Or was it just crafty old Stalin paving the way for his own deification? I think the latter. He started by changing the name of a well-known city to Stalingrad.

Yes, there is no dodging religion. Some make a religion of evolution. It can do everything, they say. And when I hear of its deeds, I am impressed. It sounds mighty like God to me, doing his work of creation with untold miracles.

Would you believe it? During the terrible purges by Stalin, when whole categories of people were swallowed up by prisons or the grave, regardless of innocence—in those very days, many communists refused to believe that Stalin even knew about it. Their god could do no wrong. Many communists were slaughtered while fervently worshipping their murderer.

Approximately 2000 chants and lyrics were written offering praise to the crafty Georgian tyrant. Never a family or group celebrated without first drinking to the health of the chief murderer of all time. During the 1930s and 1940s, one could not enter an office building, theater, or school without being confronted by Stalin at the door. The heart must have something to love, and the mind demands a philosophy in which it can rest. The human mind cannot abide an un-interpreted world.

Take Arthur Koestler's experience for example. In his essay in the volume, *The God That Failed*, he tells how as a young man Communism gave peace and joy to his enquiring mind. After poring through party propaganda he says:

Something had clicked in my brain which shook me like a mental explosion. To say that one had "seen the light"



Like every visitor to Moscow I ultimately ended up at the Kremlin.

*is a poor description of the mental rapture which only the convert knows (regardless of what faith he has been converted to). The new light seems to pour from all directions across the skull; the whole universe falls into pattern like the stray pieces of a jigsaw puzzle assembled by magic at one stroke. There is now an answer to every question, doubts and conflicts are a matter of the tortured past—a past already remote when one had lived in dismal ignorance in the tasteless, colorless world of those who **don't know**. Nothing henceforth can disturb the convert's inner peace and serenity—except the occasional fear of losing faith again, losing thereby what alone makes life worth living.*

-The God That Failed, p. 23.

One of the dangers of this honeymoon with a new credo is that difficult facts, which thereafter refuse to conform to the pattern, are ignored or rationalized away. Everything must fit the pattern, and if the facts interfere, so much the worse for the facts. No ugly facts are going to rob me of my peace. Not to mention the feeling of superiority that is now mine, having entered the ranks of the chosen. Koestler tells us about this also:

Gradually I learned to distrust my mechanistic preoccupation with facts and to regard the world around me in the light of dialectic interpretation. It was a satisfactory and indeed a blissful state; once you had assimilated the technique, you were no longer disturbed by facts; they automatically took on the proper color and fell into their proper place. Both morally and logically, the Party was infallible.

-The God That Failed, p. 24.

Eric Hoffer's classic, *The True Believer*, which sketches the characteristics of fanatics and extremists, has a section called "Make Believe" (p. 64), in which he shows the necessity for —→

TO and FRO with the Editor

Question:

My mother recently died, and I wish I could picture her in heaven now instead of being in the grave. Most preachers preach that the saved dead come back with Christ to claim their bodies. Is the Bible real clear on this? Are the preachers preaching error? Why are these men of faith preaching this if this is not biblical?

L. J.

Answer:

There are no Christian preachers whose knowledge of Scripture and of truth is infallibly accurate. None of us have theological perfection any more than we are perfect mentally, physically, or socially. For this reason, it is possible to be a sincere Christian teacher and espouse ideas that may not be absolutely correct. Therefore, preachers need to be humble and teachable enough to admit and renounce error when they are shown it.

The Bible teaching on the condition of mankind in death develops over the duration of its formation. Old Testament saints believed in Sheol. Sheol was a nether world where dead folks moved around in a kind of shadowy sub-existence. They were lost to the life of work, play, and human relationships—but not quite non-existent. During the trauma of the 2nd century B.C., when pagan forces threatened to extinguish the nation and its faith, the concept of bodily resurrection emerged.

tyrannical groups to dress up the facts until a palatable illusion has been created.

In his autobiography, *Chronicles of Wasted Time*, Malcolm Muggeridge tells of his experience in Russia in the 1930s, and his own disillusionment. He particularly stresses how many Western Liberals had been deceived by Communism and came to believe it was the source of all truth, equality, and hope—not to mention glory. After writing an account of what he himself experienced in the heartland of Communism, he found with disappointment that it did little to clear up misconceptions and propaganda lies:

People continued to regard as an open question whether there was forced labor in the USSR, and whether the confessions of the old Bolsheviks to have worked for the British Secret Service, and so on, were genuine. Shaw's picture of Stalin as the Good Fabian, and Dr. Hewlett Johnson's of him as building the kingdom of Christ, continued to carry more conviction than mine of a bloodthirsty tyrant of unusual ferocity, even by Russian

Not till Christ's great work was consummated by his return from death, did the church come into possession of the final biblical word on the death of the saints. They were gripped by a vast and powerful love. The resurrection of Jesus taught them that neither life nor death could tear them from its grasp.

Where are the dead in Christ? They are in the love of God. That is all we need to know. The dead are not lost to God. The grave is not a black hole; a God-free zone. Let this be your comfort and your hope as regards your mother. She is safe in God's care. A day will come when you and she will be reunited.


Question:

What is your view on Christian Universalism?

J. M.

Answer:

I do not doubt that Jesus died for everyone. In his Son, God endured his own judgment on human wickedness. He *was made sin for us* (2 Corinthians 5:21). John 3:16 affirms that the gift of God was for the whole world. There is 'universality' in the gospel; grandeur, and a sublime reach to his love. Yet, this does not preclude or cancel the freedom of men and women to disregard it. It is part of love's mystery that God was moved to create beings with the volitional capacity to resist him. If God were to take everyone to heaven—even those who did not want to be there—that would seriously compromise love.

Love, after all, is full of inherent risks. While God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9), he nevertheless loves so thoroughly and purely that he will not force self-conscious beings into his kingdom against their will. Instead, he "*stands at the door and knocks*" (Revelation 3:20), seeking our invitation to come in and reign. In the end, it is "*whosoever will*" (Revelation 22:17), that comes to enjoy eternity with his creator. 

standards. People, after all, believe lies, not because they are plausibly presented, but because they want to believe them. So their credulity is unshakable.

-Chronicles of Wasted Time, p. 274.

This tendency of the indoctrinated to resist the implication of facts as large as Greenland is further illustrated by Koestler as he sketches dialog between a Communist Party official and a member who is beginning to have doubts:

"The last congress of the Party," Rubashov went on, "stated in a resolution that the Party had not suffered a defeat, and has merely carried out a strategic retreat; and there is no reason whatever for changing its previous policy."

"But that's rubbish," said Richard.

"The Party can never be mistaken," said Rubashov.

"You and I can make a mistake. Not the Party."

-Darkness at Noon, p. 47.

-To be continued... 

Did You Know?


The world population today is increasing at approximately 90 million per year. United Nations Population Division forecast a population of 7.85 billion by 2025, and 8.92 billion by 2050. 98% of the population growth will occur in developing countries.

In the developing world, over 11 million children under the age of 5 years die annually of preventable diseases and malnutrition; One out of three children under five is malnourished; 1.2 billion people do not have access to safe drinking water; 2.4 billion people lack adequate sanitation; 1 billion people live in slums and squatter communities; 3 billion live on less than \$2 a day.

Humanity has consumed more of the earth's natural resources in the 50 years since WWII, than in all of history prior to that time. The Worldwide Fund for Nature stated in 2001, that humanity's ecological footprint was 2.5 times larger than in 1961, and exceeded the earth's biological renewal capacity by 20%.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees states that, the number of refugees in the world is 9.9 million (not including 4.3 million Palestinian refugees cared for by another UN agency).

In Rwanda (where almost 1 million people were massacred by fellow citizens in 1994), the frictions

between Tutsis and Hutus is a creation of European colonists. Before colonization there was little difference between the two—more like the difference between farmers and herders. They intermarried and spoke the same language. The English and Belgians decided that the minority 'herders' were taller, more European in feature, and 'more kingly.' On this basis, they were given a more privileged place in the imperialist-governed society. The tragic result of this imposed tribalism in Rwanda can be traced to elitist creation stories cooked up by the colonists; ID cards created by the Belgians, and the privileging of one group over another for political reasons. 

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I believe as it is written in the New Testament, if we should save our lives we must lose them; that we cannot live by bread alone; that we must die in the flesh to be reborn in the Spirit, and that the flesh lusts contrary to the Spirit and the Spirit contrary to the flesh; that God cannot see a sparrow fall to the ground with out concern, and has counted the hairs of each head, so that all that lives deserves our respect and reverence, and no one man can conceivably be more important, of greater significance, or in any way more deserving of consideration than any other. God is our father, we are his children, and so one family, brothers and sisters together.

-Malcolm Muggeridge. JESUS REDISCOVERED, p. 56.