

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

The Unchanging God (p. 3)

Why Did Jesus Have to Die? (p. 13)

All The World's A Stage (p. 15)

A monthly magazine written and published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are – to encourage the study of the Bible as God’s inspired message to mankind; to call attention to the Divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn men and women that soon Christ will return to Earth as judge and ruler of God’s world-wide Kingdom.

Table Of Contents

The Unchanging God  **3**

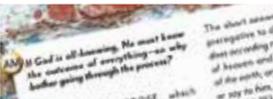
The Ten Commandments  **5**

1 Corinthians  **9**

Flesh and Spirit in Corinth  **10**

Why Did Jesus Have to Die?  **13**

All The World’s A Stage  **15**

Your E-mails and Letters  **18**

Bible Reader’s Wordsearch  **19**

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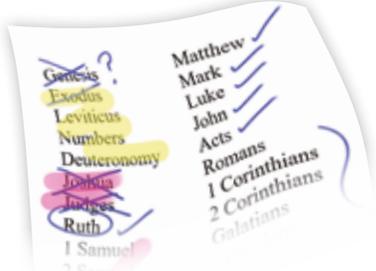
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The Unchanging God

ARE THERE PARTS of the Bible that are more relevant than others? Some Bible readers would say so—what do you think?



It's sometimes claimed that some parts of the Bible present a less pleasant view of God than other parts. The Bible's critics will allege that the Old Testament—the first part of the Bible which deals with the history of the world before Jesus Christ—presents a harsh and unforgiving God: *'the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God'* (Deuteronomy 4:24). Whereas in the New Testament, which deals with the life and teaching of Jesus and his followers, we read statements such as *'God is love'* (1 John 4:8). On this basis, there are those who prefer to disregard the Old Testament and concentrate on the New.

Developing Ideas of God?

Did God change? Or was it people's perception of God? One suggestion which is often made is that the God of the Old Testament was the product of a primitive and warlike age, whereas the God of the

New Testament was the product of Jesus and his followers who taught a more enlightened philosophy.

There are problems with this view. The first problem is that it assumes that God is the invention of people. This undermines everything the Bible says about itself. It claims to be God's revelation of Himself to us (2 Timothy 3:16). If we suppose that actually it was written by people who were portraying God as they thought He should be, then it has no authority and there's no reason why we should take it seriously.

Another problem is that the New Testament constantly refers back to the Old Testament. You don't have to get beyond its first chapter to notice this. It refers to Old Testament people and events, quotes copiously from the Old Testament, and very clearly it expects that its readers understand and accept the Old Testament. It has been said that if you take away the Old Testament, the New Testament will collapse like a building without a foundation.

And a third problem is that it is simply not true to suggest that the two Testaments present a different God. The Old Testament Law of Moses made it clear that the basis of its strict moral code was the love of God—for example *'You shall not*

take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD' (Leviticus 19:18). The New Testament, which says so much about love and forgiveness, also speaks of judgement and punishment, for example 'If we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgement, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries' (Hebrews 10:26–27).

Grace and Truth

The answer to the problem becomes clear as we read through the Bible—Old and New Testaments—and see the character of God revealed, beautifully and consistently. Very often the Bible brings out two balanced aspects of God's character: kindness and severity. Mercy and judgement. Grace (a Bible word that means 'favour towards the unworthy'), and truth. They are not in conflict, they are complementary.



For example, the history books of the Old Testament show how God treated His people, Israel. He made promises to them and blessed them, and required them to be faithful to Him. When they failed He suffered their unfaithfulness for many years, pleading with them and warning them. Finally there was no remedy, He destroyed the nation as He had warned He would—

but not completely, He left a remnant. He showed them mercy, and He also showed them the truth of His word. This is how the Bible describes God's character:

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, and repays to their face those who hate him, by destroying them' (Deuteronomy 7:9–10).

The New Testament opens with the birth of Jesus Christ. As God's Son, Jesus displayed perfectly the character of his Father (John 14:9). This is how he is introduced in John's Gospel: '*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth' (John 1:14).*

Jesus Christ showed the character of his Father in all he did: he devoted himself to teaching, healing and helping people, showing them God's grace (for example Matthew 9:35–36); and he always spoke the truth, even when it angered people (for example Matthew 23).

The God of the Bible has always been the same. He is not the indulgent grandfather-figure that some imagine, and He is not the wrathful tyrant that others imagine. He is infinitely merciful and forgiving towards those who want to be shown mercy and to be forgiven—but He will not show mercy to those who do not want it. If we find Him difficult to understand, it just means we need to get to know Him better!

The Ten Commandments

DO YOU KNOW what the Ten Commandments are? You may well have heard of them, but do you know where they came from, and how many of them could you name? It's worth a little Bible research to find the answers to these questions.

The people of Israel had escaped Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and survived three months in the desert. They were on their way to the Promised Land. They now came to a mountain range well known to Moses from his shepherding days in the Sinai Peninsula. However, the hills would be awe-inspiring to the rest of the people, who had grown up in the pancake-flat, green triangle of the Nile delta.

Moses knew that this particular mountain before which they were now pitched was a special place. There, only months before, he had removed his shoes in the presence of the angel of God. He had been promised that after delivering His people, he would bring them to worship God at Sinai (Exodus 3:12). This he had now accomplished.

But there was more to this rendezvous with God than a religious festival. God was going to enter into a very solemn agreement with His people. For two days, He kept them waiting. On the third morning, the purple flanks and soaring precipices of the great peak were wrapped in heavy cloud, and a tremendous thunderstorm broke over the mountain. The ground beneath the assembled Israelites shook convulsively, as if it, too, were afraid at the presence of God. Then, clear, silvery, and deafeningly loud, a mighty trumpet note rang out over the storm. Standing there, exposed and terrified, the people heard in awe-inspiring tones the voice of the angel of God reciting, for the first time, the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20).

That was only the beginning. Moses himself climbed the mountain into the dark cloud, to be given many more commandments. They occupy three whole chapters of Exodus (21, 22 and 23), and cover all aspects of daily living, from the punishment for theft to the importance of

kindness towards foreigners. For the Ten Commandments were the cornerstone of a great code of law that was intended to direct the moral and political life of the nation.

The Covenant

Having received the commandments, Moses proceeded to bind the people into a contract with God, Who was offering His embryo nation a land to live in. But there were conditions. They had to agree to obey the commandments He had just given to Moses.

It was like a landlord letting out his property. Before a new tenant is allowed to have the front door key, they have to read the terms of the tenancy, and add their signature to show they intend to be bound by them. Moses read out the laws to the people, then sent them to their tents for the night. By morning, he had written them down in a book, called *'the Book of the Covenant'* (Exodus 24:7).

At the foot of the hill he set up an altar, and twelve stone pillars. The altar represented God, and the pillars the tribes of Israel. Again he gathered the people together and offered a

The Ten Commandments

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honour your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness.
10. You shall not covet.

Exodus 20

sacrifice, collecting its blood in bowls. Carefully he divided the blood, and sprinkled half of it upon the altar. A second time he read out all the commandments of God. The people repeated their promise: *'All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do'* (Exodus 24:3). Moses took the remaining half of the blood and sprinkled it over the people themselves. *'Behold the blood of the covenant'* he cried, *'that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words'* (v. 8).

It may sound mysterious and even barbaric to our ears. However, the custom of the time decreed that no covenant was complete unless it had been sealed with blood. By sprinkling both the altar, representing God, and the people themselves, Moses was linking the two parties together by the blood of sacrifice.

What significance is there for us, in these events at Sinai so long ago? There are two points that emerge from the Bible's record. The first is that in spite of their declaration of intent, the Israelites failed to observe the conditions of the covenant. God brought them into the land of Canaan, where

for a while they were faithful. But soon they hankered after the visible, portable gods of the nations around them. They forgot the humane, clean laws Moses brought to them, and degenerated into violence, oppression and immorality. God warned them many times by His prophets that they were breaking the conditions of their tenancy, but they closed their ears. Eventually He turned them out of their land. The Assyrians, the Babylonians and then the Romans drove out the Jews, and finally it lay desolate for centuries.

That, you might have thought, was that. You would be wrong. Hear now a wonderful thing. So great is God's love for Israel, that in spite of their unfaithfulness He will one day take them back. In fact, He says He is going to make a new covenant with them, one that will last for ever.

A New Covenant

Listen to these moving words from the prophet Jeremiah: *'Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke' (Jeremiah 31:31–32)*. Instead of the laws of God being written in a book, they will be written this time in the people's hearts, so that they will never be forgotten. Best of all, God promises: *'I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more' (v. 34)*.

The making of this New Covenant is quite a theme in the Old Testament prophets. It is also made plain in the New Testament. Jesus is going to change the hearts of God's ancient people and bring them back to Him:

A partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins (Romans 11:25–27).



This great promise, so revealing of the merciful and gracious character of God, has not yet been fulfilled. The Jews have begun to go back to their homeland, but Jesus, the Deliverer, has not yet come out of Zion. We have God's pledged word that he will. And when he does, he will bring them back to God.

The New Testament adds the vital information that the blood of the sacrifice which confirms the New Covenant, involves the death of Jesus himself. At the Last

Supper, Jesus used the cup of wine on the table to teach his disciples that the blood of the New Covenant, the one spoken of by Jeremiah and the prophets, and by which God removes sins, was to be Jesus' own blood, poured out next day on the cross (Matthew 26:28). The Old Covenant laid down conditions which people broke. It reminded them of their sins, but it could not take them away. Jesus' blood would make possible an everlasting inheritance of the Promised Land, because it completely takes away our sins.



That New Covenant has been opened up through the Gospel to you and me today, whether we are Jews or not. Just like the earlier covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 15), it offers us eternal life in God's Kingdom. And at that time, the nation of Israel itself will be restored to God and share in His blessings.

The book of Hebrews is a letter that was written to Jewish followers of Jesus. *'For you have not come to what may be touched,'* it

says, *'a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest'*. That was the experience of their ancestors at Mount Sinai. *'But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem... and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven... and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel'* (Hebrews 12:18, 22–24).

What a great honour God holds out to us, to become His people, and to share in the good things He has in store for the world! The Apostle Paul writes to those who have been baptised and are members of God's family. They were once *'separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ'* (Ephesians 2:12–13).

David M Pearce

Questions? Comments?
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1 Corinthians

THE CORINTHIAN congregation was established by the Apostle Paul during his second missionary journey. There had been a warmer response to the Gospel in Corinth than in intellectual Athens. Paul wrote this letter whilst at Ephesus, during his third journey.



Remains of the Fountain of Peirene, Corinth

Believers With Problems

In a decadent pagan city such as Corinth, it was not surprising that problems would arise: personality factions (1:12–16; 3:1–6), human pride (1:17–2:16), idolatry (chapters 6, 8, 10), wrong teaching (11:19), and serious moral problems (chapters 5–7). The authority of the apostles was being questioned (chapters 4, 9). Paul reminded the believers of the basis of their common salvation and of the need to put their house in order. Phrases such as “Now concerning...” tell us that the letter is responding to questions which some Corinthians had raised (7:1, 25; 8:1, 4; 12:1; 16:1).

There were misunderstandings about the memorial service (‘Lord’s supper’ or ‘breaking of bread’) (10:14–22; 11:20–29); and about ‘spirit gifts’ received from God (chapters 12–14). Some had been given God’s power (the Holy Spirit), enabling them to perform miracles and make inspired utterances. But these gifts were temporary and were to cease once the Bible had been completed (see 13:8–10). In any case, more important than gifts such as the ability to speak in tongues or work miracles, were the qualities of faith, hope and love—and ‘*the greatest of these is love*’ (13:13). In chapter 15 we have a masterly summary of the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and clear teaching about the resurrection of faithful believers at Christ’s return.

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible:

- ◆ 1 Corinthians 1:27—see Psalm 8:2; Isaiah 66:2; Matthew 11:25.
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 3:11—see Isaiah 28:16; Ephesians 2:19–22.
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 15:20—see Mark 16:14; Acts 1:3; 17:31.

Flesh and Spirit in Corinth

THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED congregation of believers in the Greek city of Corinth faced many different spiritual challenges. The two letters which the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians expose these challenges vividly.



The most pressing concerned the ungodly behaviour of certain of the church's members. There were also wrong teachings. It had got so bad that some brothers and sisters did not believe that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead! Despite this 'perfect storm' of moral and doctrinal difficulties, the Corinthian church was addressed by the Apostle Paul as 'the church of God' (1 Corinthians 1:2, 2 Corinthians 1:1). He did not distance himself from them, he appealed to them and set about correcting them.

The Works of the Flesh

Firstly, just how bad were the problems at Corinth? As a preamble to the answer, in Paul's letter to the believers in Galatia we read:

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19–21).

Paul had a name for this ungodly behaviour: 'works of the flesh'. It is behaviour which arises from our innate sinful desires, unmoderated by a conscience of what is godly and healthy.

The article on page 9 gives a flavour of some of the problems the Corinthians struggled with. The 'works of the flesh' were well and truly rife among them. It would take someone extraordinary to facilitate any sort of spiritual reform in this troubled congregation.

The Apostle Paul laboured night and day to preach the Gospel, and also to strengthen his fellow disciples. We read that he felt *'the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches'* (2 Corinthians 11:28). The Corinthians must have been a particular

cause for concern. Imagine feeling responsible for the spiritual wellbeing of a troubled church such as the one at Corinth! Now imagine feeling responsible for several different churches, each with their different difficulties and challenges; truly Paul suffered for the name of Jesus, just as the Lord told him he would (Acts 9:16).

Just how were the challenges of the Corinthian church addressed? What was the antidote to the spiritual sickness that was threatening to contaminate the whole congregation?



The Fruit of the Spirit

I quoted above from Paul's letter to the Galatians. If we carry on reading, he continues:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let

us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another (Galatians 5:22–26).

The opposite of 'the works of the flesh' is 'the fruit of the Spirit'. This is behaviour which is motivated by the desire to follow God's ways. As the Corinthians were struggling with various deeds of the flesh, it follows that the solution to these problems was to be found in the fruit of the spirit.

The Necessity for Love

The first characteristic we read of the fruit of the spirit is love. Love is central to the Christian's life. 'A new commandment I give to you,' said Jesus, 'that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another' (John 13:34–35). Jesus Christ laid down his life to enable his followers to have eternal life. His followers must have concern for each other's eternal wellbeing at the centre of all their dealings.

Is love really what the troubled church at Corinth needed to achieve spiritual reformation? Interestingly, an entire section (chapter 13) of 1 Corinthians is devoted to the topic of love. Evidently, expounding the topic of love to brothers and sisters by explaining what love is and what it is not was a hugely important component of Paul's inspired spiritual intervention.

A particularly awful misdemeanour was a man who had sex with his father's wife. Paul instructed them to deal with the situation: 'Let him who has done this be

removed from among you' (1 Corinthians 5:2). Humanly speaking, this certainly doesn't sound very loving! However, it is easy for us to miss one of the key reasons why this act of moral discipline was commanded, 'so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord' (v. 5). Serious moral errors warrant serious corrective measures and these are designed with the salvation of the offender as the priority. Paul's intention was for the culprit to be galvanised towards repentance.

In his second letter Paul appears to refer back to this instance of communal discipline: 'For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow (2 Corinthians 2:6-7). As an aside, the unusual phrase 'such a one' is the same as the phrase used in 1 Corinthians 5:5 and 11. It seems that they had 'removed him' and he had repented, but now they had not welcomed him back. Despite the gravity of this brother's sin, now that he had repented Paul was eager that the church forgive and comfort him. He continues: 'So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him' (v. 8). Again, we see that love was at the centre of the corrective measure Paul commanded.

There is much more that could be said about the spiritual challenges faced by the church in Corinth and the ways Paul, with the wisdom given him, sought to help them overcome these challenges. But what we have seen is this: the solution to the 'works of the flesh' is the 'fruit of the spirit'; the

priority is to understand the supremacy of love; and sometimes brotherly love requires the use of disciplinary measures that might appear harsh. The description of love which Paul gave to the Corinthians is as relevant to followers of Jesus today as it was to those who first heard it, almost two thousand years ago:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Stephen Blake



“ Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised... And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ”

1 Corinthians 15:12-20

Why Did Jesus Have to Die?

IT'S A GOOD QUESTION, and one most people ask when they first come into contact with Bible believers. The idea that someone sacrificed themselves for others is a noble one, yet rather uncomfortable at the same time. After all, we might reason, a religion built on the idea of human sacrifice—that's a bit macabre.

One reason for Jesus' death is actually quite straightforward. It was that his words and actions antagonised the religious leaders of the day. His total honesty, coupled with his ability to be morally perfect in his actions, made them mad with envy: *'It was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up' (Mark 15:10).*

This all happened because he had shown up the hypocrisy of their religious observances, simply by being the one who observed religion in the right way—that is, motivated by love:

He said to them, "Which one of you who has a sheep, if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not take hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value is a man than a sheep! So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath." Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And the man stretched it out, and it was restored, healthy like the other. But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how to destroy him (Matthew 12:11–14).

Imagine that! A man comes into your midst, observes your religion perfectly, shows you how to do it, and in the process demonstrates God's power... and all you can do is get jealous and plot to kill him!

But this is what human nature is like, isn't it? We get jealous. We get envious of others' success. Especially if they do something we claim to be able to do, but can't.

So that's why Jesus died. Quite simply, he was killed because of human nature. It was the envy and hate within the human rulers that condemned him to death, even though he didn't deserve to die.



In God's Purpose

Now look at it from God's point of view for a moment. You've created a world full of humans. The minute you leave them to it, they start to fight, murder, and practise all kinds of evil:

The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that he

had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart (Genesis 6:5–6).

So God had to take the heartbreaking step of destroying mankind by a flood, all except Noah and his family: ‘So the LORD said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favour in the eyes of the LORD’ (Genesis 6:7–8).



Then He waited two and a half thousand years, before finally He sent His own Son—a man who was good, and who totally overcame all his urges to do evil.

Yet the religious leaders of the nation were the ones who killed him! This was his assessment of them:

You also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Matthew 23:28).

By killing Jesus, the scribes and Pharisees broke the Law they were so keen to uphold. Actually the Law had never been intended to make people perfect, but to show them they were sinners and to prepare them for the coming of Jesus (Galatians 3:19–29 explains). For he alone would be able to make forgiveness possible once and for

all, by cancelling our failures. His sacrificial death had this effect:

Cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him (Colossians 2:14–15).

Jesus fulfilled the Law, and replaced it with a new law—the Law of Christ—which gives us all the opportunity to have a new relationship with God, and have our sins forgiven. The preceding verse explains:

In him also you were... buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses (Colossians 2:11–13).

If we are baptised into Christ (by being dipped under water), then we symbolically die with him and are symbolically raised with him to a new life. How? It’s quite simple. Jesus was raised from death and, like him, we come out of the water with a new relationship with God, our sins forgiven and Jesus as our friend and Lord.

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you (John 15:13–14).

Robin de Jongh

All The World's A Stage

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.*

'As You Like It'—William Shakespeare

WHEN GOD CREATED the world (Genesis 1:1) He created the most fantastic stage set there ever was. But ahead of the coming of any actors upon the scene He had also written a great drama, with a cast of millions and an amazing climax. Just for a moment admire the set—in the distance, the heavens in their stellar glory. The immediate background shows the wonders of the creation as we view them every day.



God then created the first pair of performers (Adam and Eve) and explained to them the role He wanted them to play in the unfolding drama (Genesis 2). But in the second scene (chapter 3) disaster struck. These two actors wanted to take a short cut to the final climax—they did not appreciate that for the drama to work it would have to be played out as the

Director wanted. Happily the scenario had been devised by the great Director so as to take into account variations, not to say disasters, caused by the actors trying to change the storyline.

Good and Bad Actors

As the play has unfolded many other actors have come and gone. Some indeed have observed the intentions of the great Director and have struggled valiantly to play out their part, believing that there will indeed be a grand finale in which they will play starring roles. They each developed their own vision of where the play will end, based upon the script. When their part was finished, they went to wait in the wings for the final moment. None of these will be disappointed.

Sadly, others—many others—have come upon the scene and spurned the part they were given to play. They have spent their time examining the scenery, asking how it came to be and experimenting with changing the script. Some simply dropped out. They sat in the audience, wondering at the alterations that people had made in the Director's script. Many were deceived



into thinking that the scene in front of them was all they would ever see. Sometimes they found the action worth applauding, at other times they could not understand it, but either way they were not inclined to be part of the great production.

The script of course explained what the unfolding drama was about. Even in the earliest scenes it anticipated the appearance of the Star of the play, and showed clearly how the performance was going to end in its great climax.

It has to be said that much of the action apparently got out of control. The rate at which participants in the drama made their own changes to the script was bewildering, and to some the play just seemed chaotic. Great battles raged across each scene. The Director Himself sometimes apparently seemed to lose interest in what was going on, but then He intervened in order to bring peace for a time and bring the action back on track.



In point of fact, through every scene there were some actors who were, as best they could, following the script. And because

they trusted that the Director knew what He was doing they successfully navigated each set as it changed, with His help and promptings.

There was the Flood (Genesis 6–9), in which the whole stage was submerged in water for a time, but afterwards as the waters receded the Director reaffirmed His interest and carefully arranged evidence through a rainbow that spanned the whole stage as a reassurance that His planned drama was still on track. Throughout the action there were other hints that His purposes were being fulfilled. He chose specific individuals and then a nation (Israel) to carry on His script.

The Star of The Production

At a crucial point in the script the Star of the production appeared: Jesus Christ, through whom the whole drama would be held together and enabled to come to its final conclusion. This one actor was actually born on stage (Luke 2), amid the apparent chaos. He lived, and died whereupon all seemed lost. He amazingly came back to life (Luke 24) in the climax of a wonderful scene. It was as if it was a great rehearsal for the greatest finale that was yet to come.

Interestingly this one actor made an appeal to all the supporting cast. More and more of them engaged with him and took their parts in the development of the grand plot. Sadly most pursued their intentions not to bother with the Director's story. But this one



superb actor was able to help anyone with their own part, to enable them to conform to the unfolding drama.

What this one special actor did show, particularly, was that the Director was passionately interested in every single actor, and was constantly engaged in all that happened on stage (Luke 12:32). He was all unseen directing events toward the grand finale. Even those with apparent bit parts had the Director's full attention. In fact, to those who watch closely, the whole apparently chaotic plot can be seen to be progressing towards its brilliant conclusion.

What the Star brings to his role is indeed challenging to others: but for those who adopt his acting method, who follow his instruction, there is an inner conviction that they are part of something wonderful and that they are empowered to be fully part of all that the Director intends.

The Climax

Clearly, because of the self-delusion of those who want to 'do their own thing', the whole drama is headed for a violent conclusion. The penultimate scene is darkly frightening, with 'noises off' and the stage shaking alarmingly, and it will appear that the play is descending into ruin (Luke 21).

The chaos results in the scenery being seriously damaged. The whole atmosphere on stage is soured by the actions of those who, it is revealed, simply do not care. Most of the time actors are falling out amongst

themselves—there is serious fighting even though there are efforts to keep out of it. People are breaking up into smaller and smaller groups, hoping to create happier sub-plots of their own. There is a final cataclysmic event, and the lights go out.

But, under the expert hand of the Director, the drama has arrived at its intended conclusion. The lights slowly come on again to reveal a scene of breathtaking beauty (Revelation 21). Jesus Christ is back centre stage! The shining brightness of God's glory fills the stage—the consummation of peace and happiness on earth which He had in mind from the very beginning has finally come about. And all those, actors from all ages who have faithfully played their part, are there gathered before the King. On this scene the curtain will never fall.



David Nightingale

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AM **If God is all-knowing, He must know the outcome of everything—so why bother going through the process?**

Ed GOD HAS A PURPOSE, which is to fill the earth with His glory (Habakkuk 2:14). That purpose involves you and me (if we want it), glorified and immortal when Jesus Christ returns to establish God's Kingdom: *'When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory'* (Colossians 3:4). There are those who will respond faithfully and be part of that glorious future, and those who won't (see for example Matthew 25:31–46).

God knows everything: *'O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up'* (Psalm 139:1–2). He knows the future: *'I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done'* (Isaiah 46:9–10).

So it's a good question—why did God embark on the massive multi-billion-person six-thousand-year process that is the history of the world, with all its suffering and confusion and tragedy, when He knew from the beginning exactly what the outcome will be and exactly who will be there? He could have cut out the painful part, and created the world and us perfect.

The short answer is, because it's His prerogative to do what He wants—*'he does according to his will among the hosts of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, "What have you done?"'* (Daniel 4:35).

If we want to explore the question further, this might be an answer: God wants to share the joy of eternity with people who have had the opportunity to demonstrate that they want it. That's why He gave us free will. He could have made everything perfect at the start, and made us unable to do wrong, and made our lives easy. But instead He gave us free will, and put us in a difficult and dangerous world where we'll be tested. This is what the Apostle Peter wrote to fellow Christians in the First Century who were undergoing persecution for their faith:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:6–7).

The reason God is putting us through the process is because He is preparing us for praise, glory and honour in His Kingdom.

Resurrection

IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15 the Apostle Paul writes about resurrection—the dead rising back to life. Verses 42–44 contrast our human bodies now with the way they will be when they are transformed at the return of Jesus Christ.

Paul said that we are now subject to **CORRUPTION**. Find this word in the puzzle.

Our corruptible bodies are also described using the following words:

DISHONOUR

NATURAL

WEAKNESS

These three words are also in the puzzle, together with the three opposite words Paul used to describe incorruptible bodies. Find all of these six words and match the three pairs.

S	S	E	N	K	A	E	W	Z	D
N	P	J	N	I	U	R	H	I	F
B	W	I	P	A	V	B	S	H	D
R	Y	W	R	P	T	H	G	F	W
Y	R	Q	G	I	O	U	Q	I	X
U	O	M	I	N	T	W	R	Q	Y
Z	L	T	O	P	K	U	E	A	F
N	G	U	R	R	A	F	A	R	L
F	R	E	Q	A	N	V	H	L	G
N	O	I	T	P	U	R	R	O	C



(The three missing words are on the back cover.)

Anna Hart

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