

# Joy in the Christian Journey

*By Phil Gale*

A series of Christian articles written for *The Northern Light Magazine*.

ARTICLES FROM 2007-2008





2007

“For I Determined to Know...”

Appreciating the Value of God

Restoring our Credibility: In our Community

Walking the Walk-When Things Get Tough



By Phil Gale

Member, Victoria congregation

## "For I Determined To Know..."

**"B**an religion completely, even though there are some wonderful things about it," said Sir Elton John recently in an article in the *British Observer Music Monthly Magazine*.

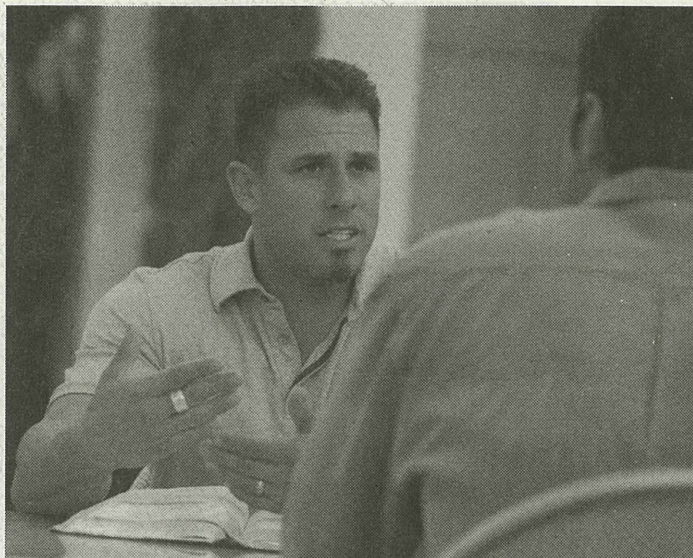
He added: "I love the idea of the teachings of Jesus Christ and the beautiful stories about it, which I loved in Sunday school and I collected all the little stickers and put them in my book. But the reality is that organized religion doesn't seem to work. It turns people into hateful lemmings and it's not really compassionate."

He called on the leaders of major religions to hold a "conclave" to discuss the fate of the world—which he said was "near escalating to World War Three".

"I said this after 9/11 and people thought I was nuts," he said. "It's all got to be dialogue—that's the only way. Get everybody from each religion together and say 'Listen, this can't go on. Why do we have all this hatred?' We are all God's people; we have to get along and the [religious leaders] have to lead the way. If they don't do it, who else is going to do it? They're not going to do it and it's left to musicians or to someone else to deal with it."

In his initial comments to the magazine, Sir Elton John was predominantly talking about gay rights. But his perspective changed as he questioned the role of organized religion in the world today.

What does this say, therefore, about the 21st century Christian movement and, maybe more importantly, about 21st century Christians? And, if Sir Elton John thinks religious leaders are not doing their jobs properly, what does it say about the world viewpoint? Maybe he is attacking religion because of its



stance against gay rights, but his further thoughts on the impact, or lack of impact religion is having in the global community, imply that religion has got its focus wrong.

The question of whether gay people should be accepted into the Christian Church is a sensitive one. No one can deny that Christians have a duty to perform, and when it comes to sensitive issues, someone has to state the Christian view. But, and here is the question, What exactly is the message Christians have been given to proclaim? Is another message being broadcast louder than the one we've been given?

Matthew 28:19-20 says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..." (NKJ throughout). The Beatitudes are replete with references to love: "Blessed are the merciful," "Blessed are those who mourn," "Blessed are the pure in heart," "Blessed are the peacemakers..." (Matthew 5).

Mark's gospel tells us Jesus stated, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your strength. ...And the second, like it, is this: You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (12:30-31).

The Apostle Paul states in 1 Corinthians 2:2, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." Paul's mission took him to many new places where he preached Jesus Christ as the Savior of the

world. That's where his focus was, and at times, although it grieved him to do so, he corrected the church on some issues. But there is no doubt where his emphasis lay.

Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, California, recently said, "We seem to be better at telling people what we're against rather than what we are for." How quick can we be to cast stones on an evil and adulterous world, when we ourselves are not without sin?

We have a responsibility to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as the Savior of the world. That is the message we have been given to deliver to a dark and hopeless world. It's a message of love, compassion and mercy, and of the divine majesty of our Father, God.

In light of the comments from Sir Elton John and Pastor Rick Warren, what message will we hear from the Christian Church in 2007? Will it be loud enough, or will it be drowned out by another message that says, "Here's what we're against, rather than what we're for"? **NL**



By Phil Gale

Member, Victoria congregation

# Appreciating The Value Of God

**H**ave you ever wondered what it will be like to actually be in the presence of God, the Creator? Not just being with him for a moment, but forever?

When God came down to Mount Sinai in the cloud and smoke, the earth shook. When Moses had been with God for forty days, his face shone so brilliantly, he had to cover it with a veil. The power of God is so great we cannot even begin to estimate how huge it is. The sun is a vast ball of fire, able to create heat and light to maintain life on our planet. Our God created that globe, which tells us that God is bigger than the sun.

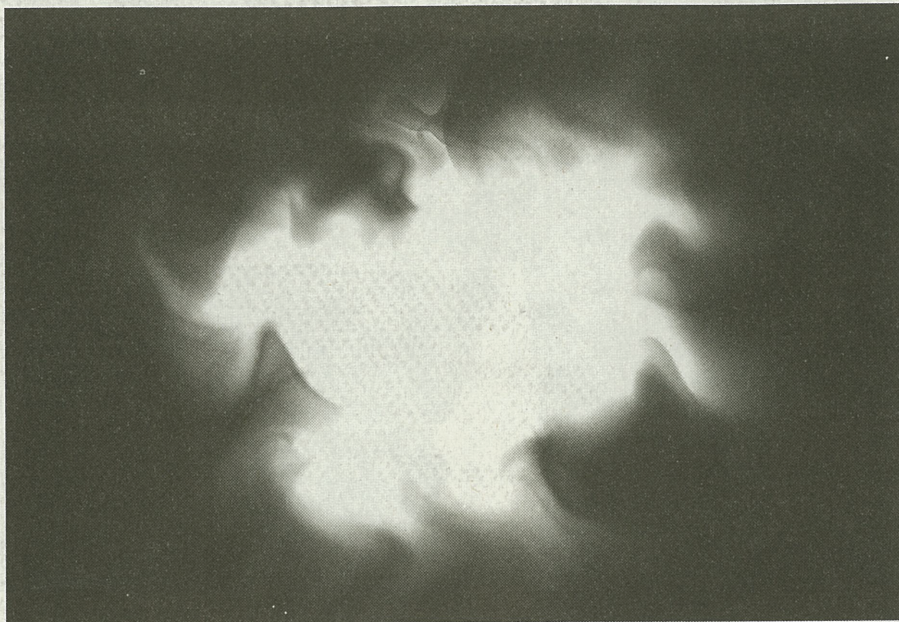
How much therefore do we appreciate God for who he is? Not for what he has done, is doing, and is going to do. Not for what he does for us, or for the things he provides, or even his wonderful purpose for humankind. But how much do we appreciate God for being—God?

It has been said many times that we appreciate things that hold value for us. If we work hard all our lives and store up provisions for our retirement like a house, car, money for vacations and a rainy day, we will appreciate our belongings because we worked hard to attain them. But for those who are given provisions or wealth without effort, they hold less value.

So how much do we value God? How much do we actually appreciate God because he is God, without expecting anything in return? Perhaps the value

we put on him is reflected in how much we appreciate him.

The first few verses of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 can serve to demonstrate this point. "Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name" (verse 9, NJK version). These words are not a request



for anything, but an acknowledgment of an attitude towards God, we agree that God is Holy and worthy of reverence.

"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Again this is a statement made from submission to what God wants, in an attitude of humility. It isn't a request for anything, but acknowledgment of the fact that God is wiser than we are.

The final sentence in the prayer is further acknowledgment of who God is, "For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

In the model prayer, the requests for help are sandwiched in between words of worship and praise. "Give us our daily bread," comes after "Hallowed be Your name," which is followed a few verses later by more worship and praise.

A world that does not know God cannot possibly appreciate him. But for Christians who know God and his brilliant plan of salvation, we have the opportunity to appreciate our Creator and tell him regularly how we feel. My own journey in this life has led me to see how much I need to appreciate God without asking for anything. He has already promised to give me eternal life through our Savior Jesus Christ; what else do I want? He also promised tribulation (John 16:33), but with it came words of encouragement because He has already overcome this world.

For us to be able to appreciate God with love, trust and honor, and to follow through with worship, praise and thanksgiving, we

are greatly blessed above all people. And like the apostle Paul in Philippians 4:11, we can say that we have learned to be content, rejoicing in the Lord always. In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians 2:2, and to the Philippians in chapter 3 verse 8 he says that he sought to know Christ, and counted all else as dross in order to gain Christ.

It sounds as though Paul appreciated God without expecting anything in return, at least not in this life. He looked forward to the ultimate goal and prize that awaited him (Philippians 3:14). We can do the same, and place a picture in our hearts and minds of what it might be like to live forever in the presence of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Appreciate, love, and trust with worship, praise, and thanksgiving. God is supremely worthy. **NL**



# Restoring Our Credibility:

## In Our Community

By Phil Gale

Member, Victoria congregation

**T**his year Emmanuel Baptist Church in Victoria, BC, once again opened its doors every Tuesday evening to the students of the University of Victoria. Volunteers prepare and serve food for over 400 young men and women, and follow the meal with social chatter. Not a Bible in sight; not a mention of the Gospel. But each week, appreciative people express their gratitude to a group of Christians who are providing a service to the community.

When this service first started a few years ago, the pastors of EBC never imagined that they would be feeding over 400 mouths each and every week. Nothing more than a handful turned up for the first meal, but in time, the snowball effect has resulted in a hugely popular evening, which takes place in the gym at the church.

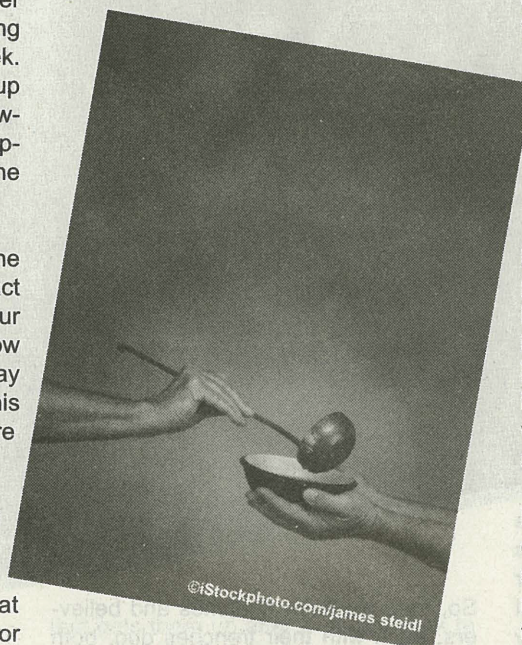
Comments from students include: "The food here is really good." "I like the fact that no one is pushing religion down our throats—only food." "I'm amazed at how many people come here on a Tuesday evening." "I told all my friends about this dinner, and most of them come here now for a great meal once a week."

Do you like "religion being pushed down your throat?" If you're hungry, wouldn't you settle for a good, wholesome meal without the feeling that someone is trying to deceive you or "rake you in?" The city of Victoria provides many opportunities for hungry folk to have a meal, without an ulterior motive from the provider. The Mustard Seed Street Church does the same thing, without preaching or trying to convert. The objective is to feed people who don't have any money or food of their own.

In the gospel of Matthew, Christ's words were, "for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was in prison and you came to Me."

"Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:35-40, NKJ throughout).

Christ's words illustrate the point that when we show love towards others, we are also giving it to God. 1 John 4:20-21 says, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, his is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."



How do we demonstrate our love towards God? By loving the people with whom we share this earth! And how do we restore credibility in a world that has been soured with doctrines that focus on "you should do this, and you should do that; you can't do this and you can't do that"? By giving to the people in our community! That is what the gospel is all about. "Pure and undefiled religion (worship) before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Christ came with healing hands, hands that provided food, and even wine (John chapter 2). He showed love wherever he went, and never once pulled rank that he was "the Christ, Son of the living God." He brought "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23), against such, there is no law." He did it in an attitude of deep humility and service to the very human beings he has created.

When religious groups and sects hide themselves away to "worship" God without reaching out to the community, are they just serving themselves? And on the other end of the scale, when we see religious extremists who murder and maim in the name of their god, are they not just satisfying their own desires and thoughts? Where is the God of love in this?

Even in our churches today, we see people with weaknesses in egos, pride, vanity, resentment; and the list goes on. We know we're not perfect and never will be in this age. But striving to emulate Christ in his service to humanity shows the world that Christ is indeed alive today, and active in his people.

If your church can't serve huge meals once a week, God isn't counting. Just serving ONE meal to someone who needs it, allows Christ to be seen through you. One little phone call to a lonely person; one small note to a sick person; one tiny coin in the cap of a disabled individual spreads the love of Christ in our community. As Christians, we are called to give – not get! Christ has promised to supply us with all our needs (Matthew 6:33), so we needn't worry about ourselves. Our work is to become involved with God's work and to follow in the footsteps of Christ.

And who can say that the sooner we do this, the sooner Christ will return to restore all things? Isn't that what we really want? Let's hope and pray so. **NL**



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*Member, Victoria congregation*

# Walking The Walk

## When Things Get Tough

**I**n the last days, stressful times will come" (2 Timothy 3:1). "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved" (Matthew, 24:12-13, NKJ throughout). The inference in Christ's message is that he is talking to his followers in this passage. "The love of many will grow cold" suggests that the stressful times that could be ahead, will cause some people to respond negatively rather than positively.

One aspect therefore of the answer to the question "What Is A Christian?" is determined by how we might respond in times of great provocation and intimidation. Not a pleasant topic to think about, is it?

First of all however, we have at least four points that reveal the identity of a Christian:

Accepting Christ as Saviour  
Believing the Gospel  
Worship and prayer  
Committed to revealed truth

### Accepting Christ as Savior

When Christ reveals the truth to us, and we accept him as Savior, how does this decision change our lives?

### Believing the Gospel

What does the belief trigger? What action is the result of the belief or faith in Christ?

### Worship and prayer

Does worship and prayer become a deeper part of our lives, wanting a closer relationship with our Creator and Savior?

### Committed to revealed truth

In the parable of the sower, the seed that landed on good ground produced fruit

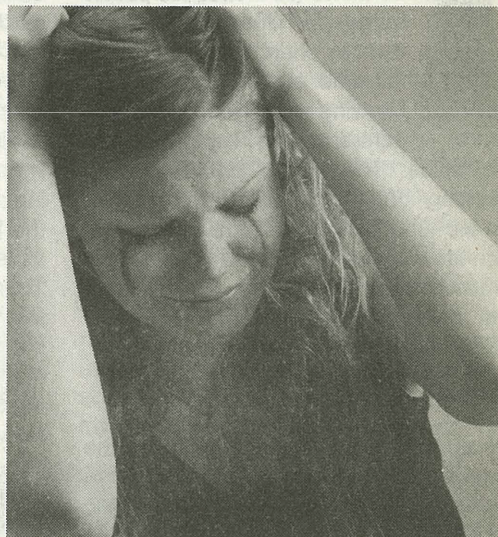
"that sprang up, increased and produced: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred" (Mark 4:8). There is no turning back from a commitment to God.

We can all answer questions about how our lives change after conversion in our own way, and we would probably be right in that Christ has made a tremendous difference. Many of us will have faced trials and testing in situations where our faith has either been strengthened or in need of some time with our Father-God.

And here's the 'but': if Jesus' statements at the beginning of this article prove to be true in our lifetime, how shall we then respond?

Looking at the most outrageous destructive act of the 21st century, 9-11, what was your response? Personally, I was very angry. I also felt helpless, and prayed that God would put vengeance on the perpetrators. Did I respond in love? No! I wanted the evil people to get their just rewards. I also wanted them to understand the futility of their efforts, and tell them they were being used by evil forces they could not see. Retribution, revenge, justice – and revealed truth.

As a Christian, I can leave the control of earth's events in God's very capable hands. "See that you are not troubled: for all these things must come to pass..." (Matthew 24:6). The Apostle Paul also sheds some light on our potential response in times of great stress. If we read part of his account in 2 Corinthians 11:24-27, we can see how much he suffered for the sake of the gospel. Five times he received 39 stripes, three times beaten with rods, shipwrecked, robbed, hungry and tired. Yet he also tells us in Philippians 4:11-12, "...I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content." Paul went through the proverbial "hell" on earth, and yet his faith was not shaken.



God knows our hearts, and he also knows we cannot perform miracles – at least not on our own strength. God loves us and does not stand over us with a big stick waiting for us to make a mistake. He encourages us to move forward, knowing we are not perfect and will stumble at times. Our job is to get up and get back on the track. That is what Paul did continually. One of the signs of a Christian is to keep the faith, sometimes under very difficult conditions. "But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

A Christian is an ambassador of Jesus Christ on earth, and will perform duties becoming of a disciple. When times get tough, faith will grow also, and man will once again see God on earth, through Christians. "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

A Christian allows the love of God to be expressed through him in all circumstances, many of which are beyond our control and not of our choosing. Ask Noah, Moses, Joseph (Old Testament) and Paul. They'll tell you. **NL**



2008

He Made Tents

Reaching out in Love - The Christian Train Journey

John 3:16 (and verse 17) - Jesus Came to Save, not Condemn

Hope-Anticipation with Confidence

If All Else Fails, Read the Instructions



By Phil Gale

Member, Victoria congregation

## He Made Tents

**I**n the world you will have tribulation; but be encouraged, I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

Stress is of this world, and it therefore demonstrates to us that the closer we are to this world, in a spiritual sense, the closer we'll be to stress. And by spiritual, I mean in attitude—where the heart lies. As Christians, we are in the world but not of it. Our goal and focus is different, and it's only when we become too immersed in this world's affairs that it begins to have a negative effect on our lives.

Seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:33). Also note that the emphasis is on "given," as opposed to "strived for." If we have all our needs, what is there to get stressed about?

It's easy to see God as our own personal vending machine where we deposit a coin in the slot (good works), and out comes a blessing. Food, clothing and shelter are all we really need, and if we follow the example of the Apostle Paul, he worked his own passage delivering the gospel message to the places to which he was led. I know it sounds strange, but on his journey he wasn't setting up stands to promote tent sales. He didn't sell franchises for his tabernacle products.

So, are we in step with God's purpose? I don't know about you, but I want to fulfill God's purpose in and for me. I want to appreciate God for who he is, not only for what he provides. In short, I want my life to be about God. If I can do that, I can distance myself from all the stressful events that affect me directly and indirectly.

It's not easy to hand over control to God, live one day at a time, demand nothing, but appreciate everything. All we actually need is food, clothing and shelter, and if we have more than that, we are rich.

Matthew 6:24 says, "No one can serve two masters—you cannot serve God and mammon." The word mammon is an interesting word, and I quote from the *King James Bible Commentary* (Nelson):

"The term 'mammon' is derived from the Aramaic term for possessions or wealth. Jesus is not condemning money or possessions in and of themselves, but the improper attitude of enslavement toward wealth. There is no halfhearted service for God. It is either all or nothing. Jesus gives the believer no option between loving God and loving the world. The regenerated heart is one which so longs for righteousness and desires the things of heaven that it lives above the temporal things of the earth."

We can either be devoted to God or devoted to our lives here on earth—but not both. Christ tells us to seek first the kingdom and God's righteousness and he will provide for us.

The Apostle Paul's ministry was hard for him, and he suffered a lot. But he was devoted to God and the mission he'd been given. This did not always result in comfort and plenty, quite the opposite. But he did have food, clothing and shelter as he needed it.

According to Larry Crabb in *The Pressure's Off*, there are three intruders who seek to deceive and seduce us into believing error as compared to the truth of God (page 61):

1. The world around us—with all its glamor, promises and false expectations, short-term pleasures instead of long-term security in God's kingdom.
2. The devil—who seeks to deceive and devour us, mixing a little truth with a lot of error, and leading us away from God.
3. The flesh that lies within us, or our own deceiving minds and hearts (Jeremiah 17:9). We convince ourselves wrong is right because of what we really

want. We justify our actions and convince ourselves we deserve better.

Larry Crabb goes on to say: "It's difficult to recognize when it happens, but at some point a shift occurs in our thinking. Somewhere—we stop thinking of Christ as Sovereign Lord (if we ever did) and regard Him more as a Useful Friend. The point of knowing Him becomes a good life for us now, in this world."

The Apostle Paul is our example, in that he was on the Lord's side, and ambition and desire for things in this life, as few as they were for him, were secondary to his primary goal of preaching the gospel. In order to survive, he made tents. Paul was content with his life in Christ, and it kept him strong in times of great stress. His mission statement was: "For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."

As in our present times, stress was rampant in the New Testament era, but because his mind was on the things of God, Paul was able to say: "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content; I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

I can do everything God requires of me (as opposed to what I want to do) through Christ who provides the strength (my paraphrase of Philippians 4:13).

Paul faced stress, but as we read through his letters, we can see how he coped with it—he stayed close to God and His purpose. **NL**



**By Phil Gale**

*Member, Victoria congregation*

# Reaching Out In Love

## The Christian Train Journey

**H**ave you ever felt that your Christian life is like a train journey? Once you get on, you know you're headed for your destination, and you have no intention of getting off until you arrive. But, along the way, there are various stops, allowing passengers to get on or off. At times, people sit down beside us and recount details of the journey they have experienced so far. And as we share this brief sojourn, we get to know them a little, laughing with them, grieving with them, describing our hopes and dreams.

When they reach their particular destination, or train station, they may disappear from our lives, but never to be forgotten. The time we've spent with these people may have changed our lives forever. They may have shared an intimate story with us of loss and grief, how they lost a loved one to sickness or war. It may have encouraged us to be stronger in our faith, as it did with them, and in due course we can encourage others as the story flows on like a river heading for the ocean. It passes fields and streams, locks and waterfalls, marinas and docks leaving a little residue wherever it touches the riverbank.

### Bear with Each Other

Sometimes when new people join our train, in visiting our particular church or Bible study, they may be looking for truth, faith or security, or they may be newcomers in the faith. God of course can supply all their needs, using us as channels for his wisdom and love. The

Paul also addresses the subject of shouldering a yoke in Galatians 6:2-10. Verses 9 and 10 sum up the patience we need in our walk: "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."

**As Christians on this journey, as we travel through cities and villages, peace and stress, in poverty or plenty, we can realize that there are fellow Christians who are traveling alongside us.**

Apostle Paul said, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples (weaknesses) of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbour for his good, leading to edification (building up)" (Romans 15:1-2). He goes on, "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God" (verses 5-7).

### A Welcome from the Heart

As Christians on this journey, as we travel through cities and villages, peace and stress, in poverty or plenty, we can realize that there are fellow Christians who are traveling alongside us. They may not at first reveal some of the finer details of their lives, which may involve heartache or disappointment. But we can welcome them with open arms into our own community. It may take a while to get to know them, or for them to feel comfortable in their new surroundings, but as they occupy a carriage with us, we can share God's love with them.

Our train journey may take us through many years of contrasting experiences, with the ups and downs of life, but we can always remember we are never alone. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus Christ assures us, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Let's expound this profound truth to our fellow travelers, and encourage them to "continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22) while we take their yoke upon us and walk together with Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.**NL**





**By Phil Gale**

*Member, Victoria congregation*

## John 3:16

### Jesus Came To Save, Not Condemn

**A**nother article about John 3:16, the most quoted and well-known verse in Christendom? Almost – but not quite.

John 3:16 states very plainly that God sent his own Son into the human arena, and that all who believe what he says will not die but live for eternity.

An excellent reference for the converted or anyone professing to be a Christian. But what does it say to those who are not so well-versed in the writings of the Holy Bible? What does it tell us about God's plan of salvation for all humankind? In fact what does it tell us about God himself?

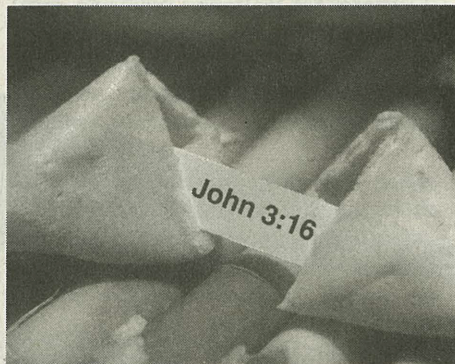
A common viewpoint of Christianity from believers and non-believers, is that there is a heaven and a hell. If we live a good life, we go to heaven. On the other hand, if our deeds are not so good, we risk going to hell, purgatory, eternal damnation.

But John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world." If God loves the world so much, why would he prepare a place of eternal suffering? Not much room for grace or mercy there – in fact it shows a God who believes in eternal punishment for those of us who have been "naughty". The two principles of Godly love and eternal punishment seem to be incongruent. (see [Sinners In The Arms Of A Loving God](#))

But, John 3:17 comes to the rescue, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." Christ did not come to condemn! His desire was to see all people saved.

I think the problem quoting John 3:16 by itself, is that it is incomplete, even though the majority of professing Christians believe the verse serves an important purpose. A more complete scripture reference, if one wants to quote one passage, is John 3:16-17, and there are some very important reasons why.

If I were to ask you to state in one short sentence the basic gospel message that the world needs to hear, what would you say? One short sentence is all you have, to tell a non-believer the purpose behind Jesus Christ, and how it fits into God's eternal plan.



"Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world."

That sentence tells us the deep, profound truth about who Christ is and the mission he came to fulfill on earth, and John 3:17 gives us that same message that Jesus was more concerned with saving people not in condemning them. For example, he saved the woman caught in adultery; he saved Nicodemus, and did not condemn him, and he saved the thief on the cross who was crucified alongside him.

For me, the world around us needs to hear more about the God of love who demonstrated edification and encouragement wherever he went; he only did good. He didn't punish anyone, he didn't hurt anyone, he didn't kill anyone, and the only people who received a lashing from his tongue were the money-changers, who had turned his Father's house into a commercial business area, and the Pharisees for their hypocrisy.

He cried over Jerusalem, because like a mother hen who seeks to pull her chicks under her wing and protect them, Christ came to his nation Israel – the one and only Jewish nation. But, for the most part, they rejected him, their own Creator and Benefactor. If it weren't for him, there wouldn't be a nation of Israel.

Jesus cried when Lazarus died, and resurrected him from the dead. He fed 4,000 hungry mouths and performed the feat a second time with 5,000 people. He dared to touch a leper and healed him, when no other person wanted to come within miles of the disease.

He healed a blind man on the Sabbath which incurred the wrath of the priests, and after the poor man had been thrust out of the synagogue, Jesus went and found him to offer comfort and support.

How many examples do we need before we see a pattern emerging? The miracles recorded in the gospels are not the sum total of all the works Jesus performed – far from it. But the Man of God, Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God in the flesh, demonstrated love, mercy, patience, kindness and joy. Does that sound like a God who is bent only on condemnation and eternal punishment? Or a God who has the desire for most to succeed in a relationship with Him?

God did not send his Son into the world to condemn, but to save (John 3:17).

John 3:16 and 17 complement each other, and each one by itself is incomplete.

Matthew 28:18-20 contains Christ's instructions to us to go into the world and represent God. How well are we doing that? By warning people that God is going to seek vengeance through eternal suffering? Or by citing examples from the gospels of how Christ healed the sick, fed the hungry, forgave sinners and suffered a brutal, excruciatingly painful death, in order that you and I might be saved?

The key message from Christianity to a troubled world needs to be one of love and mercy, "Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world."

Taken together, John 3:16 and 17 help to proclaim that message. **NL**



By Phil Gale

Member, Victoria Congregation

## Hope – Anticipation with Confidence

**R**ecently, I started looking for a larger apartment as my needs have changed, and my small accommodation is no longer sufficient. In my part of the world, this is the time students are coming to town to attend university, so there's a lot of competition for apartments and condos.

After searching fruitlessly for over a month, I found an adorable suite, in an almost new house, in a much-sought-after area, and at a price I could afford. "This is it," I thought, and put in the required application. This particular ground floor suite would suit my needs perfectly, and being in a rural location would be better than the city I had been used to.

The agent took almost a week to decide whom, out of the approximately six applicants, would be the lucky person. My application was good, my references were impeccable, and I was readying for a move to my new home. But, when I eventually spoke to the agent, I was told the suite had been offered to another party. Disappointment!!

My hopes of a quick move into the perfect home and location had been dashed, and I was left feeling and thinking rather negatively about the whole episode. Why didn't I get it? I was obviously the best candidate, with the best references, and my needs must have been more important than all the other souls who had similarly applied for the domicile (I jest, of course).

I'm sure you've had your hopes dashed in a similar way. Perhaps it was a job interview, or a

university application, maybe a promotion or bonus you were hoping to get. It's never pleasant to face disappointment, and have our hopes for a better future, spoiled.

In October, I'm planning to travel to the UK. It'll be my first visit since I left to be in Canada in 1994. I'm going to see my aging parents, and a few other family members. In the last few weeks, I've learned that my father is not well, and I sincerely hope he can hang on until I arrive in mid-October. My hope in this situation however, unlike the first one related above, is that I have a sure hope of seeing my father again, even if not in this earthly realm. I wrote and told him that, in a way he could understand. I look forward to seeing many of my deceased relatives and friends again, at some point in the future.





### **By Phil Gale**

Member, Victoria Congregation

For me, that is a sure hope, and totally unlike the situation of hoping for a new apartment or job, which is never guaranteed in this life. Seeing loved ones, and being in the presence of the Triune God is a sure hope that will never leave me.

The word 'hope' is used 58 times in the New Testament, at least 39 times by the Apostle Paul. In each case, the original word from the Greek is 'elpis' or 'elpos' meaning 'anticipation with confidence.' It is a sure hope - something that will never disappoint.

In the book of Romans, Paul is talking about the Patriarch Abraham, and how he was blessed. "Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all....who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "so shall your descendants be."" (Rom 4:16-18 NKJ) The hope spoken here is a sure hope, that Abraham believed what God told him, and acted accordingly.

Paul goes on from verse 20 "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what he had promised he was also able to perform. 'And it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who

believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." (Verses 20-24).

Hope in this world, is totally different from the hope described in our Bibles, especially in light of the words of the Apostle Paul. Abraham knew all about hope; it was a hope in a new city whose maker was God (Hebrews 11:10, author unknown).

If you're hoping for a new job, a better home, or a brighter future, we can remember that our real hope is in that of our forefather Abraham, in which we see a brilliant Kingdom, with all the wonderful blessings and surprises our Father-God has in store for us.

PS. Less than a week after my apartment disappointment, I found another, which in many ways is better than the first. Thank you, my Father God.



**By Phil Gale**

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# If All Else Fails, Read the Instructions

**A** few years ago, I completely renovated my kitchen and put in new cabinets. I bought the flat-pack type which needed to be assembled. Because the, cabinets were going up on the wall, they had to be strong and put together properly to prevent them coming apart full of crockery or foodstuffs.

In this case, I had to carefully read the manufacturer instructions to safeguard their stability. That's not always the case with me though as I prefer to get all the pieces out of the box and put the thing together as I see fit. Sometimes it works, and sometimes it doesn't. I just hate building something from a kit, only to have parts left over at the end, or finding that the last screw I have to put in is the wrong size, having used the right one somewhere else. Sometimes it pays to read the instructions and put it right first time, instead of guessing how it's supposed to work.

You've probably been in one of those tall skyscrapers in a big city like New York, London or Toronto. Have you been up to the 70th floor and looked down to the ground to see how high up you are? The tallest building I've been in was in Dubai, and when I was half way to the moon it seemed, I looked out of the window and was struck with vertigo - I don't like heights, even though I knew I was safe surrounded by tons of concrete and steel.



Most of those tall buildings in the modern world are constructed to withstand some very heavy weather, including earthquakes. Imagine all that concrete tumbling to the ground at the slightest

movement of the earth. So, in order to prevent this, the building engineers and architects have planned it using building codes, so that if the earth moves beneath it, the building moves with it and does not fall. That makes it safe, stable, and dependable even in the worst storms and circumstances. The integrity of the building will not fail because of the way it has been built. The guys responsible for its construction have followed the instructions given to them to ensure that there are no parts left over at the end, or that they

used the wrong size screws so to speak. The result is that safety and security is maintained in the building.

When God designed and constructed the Earth, He stuck to some pretty rigid standards and values to ensure things would be stable and secure. And He put into place universal laws and principals that always play out, without fail. Take gravity for example; we know if we drop something from a great height, it will fall to the ground. We'd be in a lot of trouble if rain started falling up, or our supper started floating above the plate as we were trying to eat. There is a reason for gravity, and we learn that from experience. If we drop a cup or a plate, and it falls to



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the kitchen floor and shatters, we know that gravity is at work because, without fail, things will always fall to the Earth.

God's integrity, like that of the tall building we were talking about, is the same, in that it is reliable and safe. God will not compromise with the building codes of life. He has set certain laws of life in motion that He will not tinker with, because it gives us security to know exactly where the results will be if we try to go against that law. If we plant a seed potato in the ground, and water it and tend to it, after a few months we get potatoes. Likewise, with flowers or shrubs, if we plant roses in the spring, we get roses in the summer. Whatever we plant, that's what we'll dig up and eat, or enjoy the look and fragrance of.

As human beings, we seem to prefer designing our lives without any interference from any outside source. I know I'm very independent, and usually dislike anyone trying to tell me how to run my life. This doesn't always work though, and I've learnt that sometimes I need to listen to other people's suggestions, but, in the main, I like to be in command of my decision-making. However, I've also learnt that when I've tried to compromise with standards or values, I reap what I've sown. Things have a habit of catching up with us. To be a good deceiver, one must have a good memory, otherwise we forget what we've said, and when our guard is down, we give ourselves away. Much better to stick with the truth in the beginning where our word is our bond, reliable, dependable, and safe. Like God's bond with us.

You may be wondering what all this has to do with how the world works, and why there are so many wars, diseases, altercations, which only produce suffering and pain. Plainly speaking, God is a God of love, not condemnation. If you think that He sits in heaven wanting to punish people at the slightest provocation, then you need to alter your perspective of God to understand what He is accomplishing here on this lovely planet.

God has given us an instruction manual - The Bible. It shows us HIS own integrity, and when we follow its guidance, and get in step with His values, the outcome is assured. Most of the problems we face in the world have defied the law of gravity - we want to reap something different to what we've planted. If we repeatedly treat people with less than love, and we don't want those relationships to shatter on the kitchen floor, we must realize that this is going to happen anyways. If we plant discord, we're going to end up with a negative life - that's God's law in motion. It's reliable, secure, and dependable.

Fortunately, the opposite is also true. When we plant love or show compassion and offer forgiveness to other people, we too will receive the same. If we live a life of giving and service, we reap the benefits, even though they may not come immediately; nevertheless, they are assured. When we drop a plate, it will fall to the ground and shatter - guaranteed. So, to ensure a life that is in accordance with God's divine plan, we first need to read His instructions and follow them carefully.