

# THE CROSS AND THE RESURRECTION

▼ Click on a study you'd like to see ▼

**2** HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE  
FOR A GROUP STUDY

**3** INTRODUCTION

**5** Study 1: **WHY JESUS HAD TO DIE**  
*Leader's Guide — Article*

**14** Study 2: **THE CROSS AND OUR GUILT**  
*Leader's Guide — Article*

**23** Study 3: **ENCOUNTERS WITH THE RISEN LORD**  
*Leader's Guide — Article*

**33** Study 4: **A RESURRECTION THAT MATTERS**  
*Leader's Guide — Article*



# HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE FOR A GROUP STUDY



This Bible study can be used for an individual or a group. If you intend to lead a group study, follow these simple suggestions.

- 1** Make enough copies of the article for everyone in the group. If you would like your group to have more information, feel free to copy the leader's guide for them as well.
- 2** Don't feel that you have to use all the material in the study. Almost all of our studies have more information than you can get through in one session, so feel free to pick and choose the teaching information and questions that will meet the needs of your group. Use the teaching content of the study in any of these ways: for your own background and information; to read aloud (or summarize) to the group; for the group to read silently.
- 3** Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting people to open up.
- 4** When working through the questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for your group to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
- 5** Begin and end the session in prayer.



# INTRODUCTION



**G**ood Friday and Easter are the very essence of Christianity. There is no more important observance or celebration in the Christian calendar. Yet what do the Cross and the Resurrection mean to our lives? How can they change the way we live?

**“WHY JESUS HAD TO DIE”** shows how we’d like to think of our post-conversion lives as a spotless and continuous pursuit of sanctification. But as Mark R. McMinn reflects in a *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* article, we can persist in sin for years without realizing it. So what is sin and how can we recognize it? Why isn’t our sin immediately apparent to us after conversion? And is there a balancing act between knowing our wretchedness and accepting the grace of Christ?

**“THE CROSS AND OUR GUILT”** looks at how some people struggle with guilt and how others have simply learned to live with it. In his *CHRISTIANITY TODAY* article, Philip Yancey says there’s a better way for believers to handle guilt. It can even work for us as we seek to grow in Christ’s likeness. This study asks, “If God forgets our sins, why can’t we? Or should we?”

**“ENCOUNTERS WITH THE RISEN LORD”** zeroes in on how the risen Christ appeared to his followers in different ways, which demonstrated his care for their uniqueness. He continues to meet people in distinctive ways today. “God comes to us in various ways, accommodating our pain, fear, doubt, abstraction, and pride,” says John Witte Jr. in his article for *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*. In what unique ways did Jesus meet his followers after



his resurrection? How did his appearances demonstrate his consideration of their life experiences, emotional fragility, and individual personalities? How does Jesus meet people today? How do we respond with grace to other believers who experience Christ in ways that are unfamiliar to us?

**“A RESURRECTION THAT MATTERS”** admits that without Jesus’ death, there is no access to heaven for sinners and no hope for lasting moral improvement. Author J. R. Daniel Kirk, in the CHRISTIANITY TODAY article, “A Resurrection That Matters,” was a leader at his InterVarsity group in college and had such a Cross-centered outlook. Yet one Easter he came to realize that his theology was missing something very important—the Resurrection. “One day as I was walking back to my dorm,” Kirk says, “it dawned on me that the gospel as I understood it had no need for Jesus to be raised from the dead.” Does your gospel have room for the Resurrection? This study will help show you why it should.



# WHY JESUS HAD TO DIE

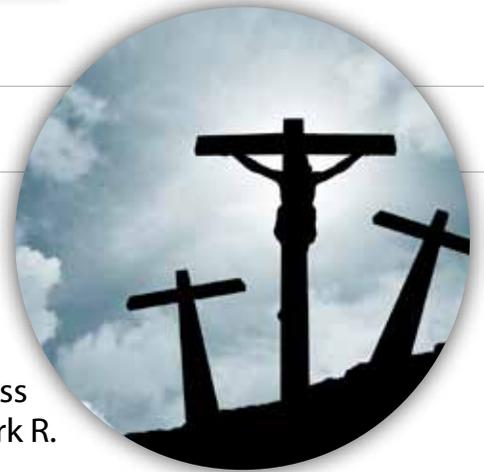
Conquering our sin is the reason for the Cross.

**A**s the popular hymn “Amazing Grace” suggests, we all once were lost, but if we’ve given our lives to Christ, we’ve been found and saved from sin. We’d like to think of our post-conversion lives as a spotless and continuous pursuit of sanctification. But as Mark R. McMinn reflects in a recent CHRISTIANITY TODAY article, we can persist in sin for years without realizing it. Like John Newton, who continued trading slaves even after his conversion, we can unknowingly commit terrible offenses against God.

So what is sin and how can we recognize it? Why isn’t our sin immediately apparent to us after conversion? And is there a balancing act between knowing our wretchedness and accepting the grace of Christ?

**Scripture:** Luke 15:11–32; Romans 7:7–25; Ephesians 4:17–32; 1 John 1:8–2:6; 3:4–10

**Based on:** The article “Amazing Sin, How Deep We’re Bound,” by Mark R. McMinn, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, May 2004



# The Cross and the Resurrection

## WHY JESUS HAD TO DIE

Leader's Guide

### Part 1 IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE

*Note to leader: Provide each person with the CHRISTIANITY TODAY article "Amazing Sin, How Deep We're Bound," included at the end of this study.*

Years ago, the psychiatrist and theologian Karl Menninger wrote a provocative book titled *Whatever Became of Sin?* Menninger reflected on his many years of dealing with people on the edge of despair and psychological and spiritual chaos, and asked, *Have we as a culture lost sight of sin and its consequences? Do we excuse it? Do we forget it? Do we explain it away? And why?*

In the intervening years, few authors of any theological stripe have explored the insidious nature of sin, the importance of repentance, and the need for correction in Christian life. Perhaps people think sinfulness defines life before conversion and grace defines life after conversion (understood as a specific experience). Yet, as Mark McMinn writes in his article, even John Newton, the author of "Amazing Grace," separated his conversion and confession from his business practice.

Christians can be misled into sin even in the midst of their movement into sanctification. Today especially, sin is subtle, powerful, and constantly present because of the reach of electronic media and the philosophy of our time that stresses the need for self-esteem. It simply is not healthy for anyone to consider themselves *wretched*.

How can we as Christians better understand the continuing battle with our wretchedness?

#### Discussion Starters:

**[Q]** Give some examples of well-publicized and obvious sinful behavior. What makes these behaviors and actions sinful? How are they confronted, and by whom? How are they explained and justified as well as criticized?

**[Q]** Is sin a matter of personal perspective or opinion, or are there some generally accepted notions of sinfulness?

**[Q]** Look up the dictionary definition of the words *wretch* and *wretched*. Are these words commonly used today? Why or why not?

**[Q]** Do you think a true Christian can continue in sin? Explain.

**[Q]** How can sin be present in a believer's life? If you dare to do so, share how you struggle with sin in your life. What do you do about it?



## Part 2 **DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES**

### **Teaching Point One: God's Word makes clear that dealing with the sinful nature is a process as well as an event.**

Many churches teach that a conversion experience results in instant transformation: when we make a commitment to follow Jesus Christ, God deals with our sins and we are instantly sanctified.

The Bible, especially the New Testament, presents a different point of view. The apostle Paul taught that, while we may move away from obvious and evident sin, we contend with inner attitudes and misunderstandings that cause us, unwittingly, to move away from God's grace. Or we persist in sinful pursuits and justify them—as John Newton did when he continued in the slave trade after his conversion. Dealing with our sinful nature is a process that takes time rather than a one-time event.

Read Romans 7:7–25 and 1 John 1:8–2:6. Then discuss these questions:

- [Q]** How does God's law reveal sin in a believer?
- [Q]** How does sin deceive us—even after we confess our faith in Christ and seek to follow him faithfully?
- [Q]** Describe a time when you wanted to do the right thing but could not. How did you recognize your weakness? How did you confess it and change your behavior?
- [Q]** What did Paul mean in Romans 7:24 when he cried out, "What a wretched man I am!"? Is that too strong a statement? Why would he say that? Could we utter the same cry?
- [Q]** What did John mean when he talked about claiming to be without sin? Why can't we make that claim?
- [Q]** How do you confess sin? To whom do you confess sin? Some churches practice formal confession and absolution. What do you think of that practice? Why?
- [Q]** Mark McMinn says one way of dealing with sin is to "deny our complicity and blame others for messing up the world. In doing this, we put ourselves in the role of moral spectators, critics, or victims." Do you agree with McMinn? How do we develop a system of denial in our spiritual lives?
- [Q]** The second option, McMinn says, is to confront and confess our sin. How and when can that happen? In what way is this a lifelong process?

## The Cross and the Resurrection

# WHY JESUS HAD TO DIE

### Leader's Guide

#### **Teaching Point Two: Sin constantly seeks to draw us away from God, and we regularly need to repent.**

Read 1 John 3:4–10 and Luke 15:11–32.

It is one thing to receive the salvation we have in Jesus Christ and to be delivered from our sins. It is quite another to fully receive Christ in our lives and to be Christ in the world. We have been reconciled, but we struggle to incorporate fully the breadth and depth of that reconciliation and to live it out. That is why repentance is a necessary and ongoing Christian discipline. We strive to be sinless, but we do fall into sin.

Mark McMinn describes John Newton's sense of repentance and coming to Christ, but also his continuation of his highly profitable slave trade. According to McMinn, "Newton even wrote that being the captain of a slave ship was optimal for 'promoting the Life of God in the Soul.'"

**[Q]** Why didn't Newton regard his behavior as wretched? How does his story relate to how the faithful brother saw himself in relation to the prodigal brother? What is the spiritual danger of the elder brother's attitude?

**[Q]** Can a Christian really be sinless? Is Mark McMinn right that sanctification is a lifelong process? Why or why not?

**[Q]** John writes that "no one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God" (1 John 3:9). What does he mean? What is the impact of this assertion on the spiritual life?

**[Q]** What prompts repentance? How does one become aware of the need for repentance in life, especially if one thinks that he or she is a good person and a good Christian?

#### **Teaching Point Three: As we move toward spiritual maturity, we become more aware of our wretchedness in contrast to God's glory—and more aware of God's amazing grace.**

Read Ephesians 4:17–32.

The words to "Amazing Grace"—"I once was lost but now am found; was blind, but now I see"—suggest there is a segment of life when a person is lost and separated from fellowship with God, and then a moment when he or she is found. A person once was blind and lived blindly—but now he sees, and has permanent spiritual vision at the 20/20



## The Cross and the Resurrection

# WHY JESUS HAD TO DIE

### Leader's Guide

level. At least that is what many churches teach—and people struggle with newly discovered lostness and newly experienced blindness.

As Paul notes, the Christian life involves “putting off the old self.” Instead of either/or when it comes to this repentance, perhaps it is both/and. That is, in the spiritual life the Christian moves through stages of spiritual development so that new levels of lostness surface, or new levels of blindness are experienced. In other words, spiritual growth leads to greater recognition of sin and another level of repentance. Repentance is a process in the movement toward spiritual maturity, as is the wonder of God’s amazing grace.

**[Q]** Mark McMinn writes, “But when I look at myself honestly, I see my sin.” How do you look at yourself honestly? How have you become aware of your sin? Could there be a time when you are sinless?

**[Q]** What did John Newton do, ultimately, to “put on the new self”? Why did it take so long?

McMinn writes: “Seeing our sin occurs over a lifetime of pursuing God. Our vision is seldom restored in a single burst of light but with countless rays streaming into our darkened eyes over many years—and always in the midst of amazing grace. At the end of his life Newton said to his friends, ‘My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior.’”

**[Q]** How does God’s amazing grace manifest itself in this earthly life? How have you experienced God’s amazing grace recently?

## Part 3 **APPLY YOUR FINDINGS**

One dynamic discovered by the great saints of the church is that the closer they move to God, the more they become aware of their utter sinfulness. They in fact decrease in their sense of spiritual stature—but God makes them greater and accomplishes wondrous things through them.

### **Action Points (to do on your own this week):**

• *Look up some of the great saints in history who have demonstrated their awareness of sin in view of God’s grace. Jot down what you learn. Are there any saints today who are demonstrating God’s amazing grace while acknowledging their wretchedness?*



# The Cross and the Resurrection

## WHY JESUS HAD TO DIE

Leader's Guide

• *How can you acknowledge your wretchedness without feeling despair? Get together with your pastor or a friend to discuss this idea further.*

— *Study by John R. Throop, a writer on theology, ethics, and church ministry.*

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com)

- [Matthew: The Passion Week](#) (6-session course)
- [Easter Week: Sacrifice and Salvation](#) (4-session course)
- [The Cross](#) (single study)
- [The Passion of the Christ](#) (movie discussion guide)

 [Holiness By Grace](#), by Bryan Chappell (Crossway Books, 2003)

 [Saved From What?](#) by R. C. Sproul (Crossway Books, 2002)

 [Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Salvation](#), by Barbara Brown Taylor (Cowley Publications, 2001)

 [Whatever Became of Sin?](#) by Karl Menninger (E. P. Dutton, 1973)

 [What's So Amazing About Grace?](#) by Philip Yancey (Zondervan, 2002)





## Amazing Sin, How Deep We're Bound

*Finding the courage to trust in grace.*

By Mark R. McMinn

I have often heard Christians speak of John Newton's powerful story: how he was once a slave trader who was gripped by God's love in the midst of a tumultuous storm on the high seas. We hear the story and assume that Newton turned immediately from his sin after that awful storm in 1748, and then sat down to write, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me."

His blind eyes may have been opened on that dismal night, but not wide enough. Upon his return to Liverpool, Newton promptly signed on as mate of another ship and sailed to Africa, where the Christian traveled from village to village buying human beings and returning them as cargo. He then sailed across the Atlantic, studying a Latin Bible in his quarters as 200 slaves lay in the hull, shackled two by two, squeezed into shelves like secondhand books. As many as a third died during the long voyage across the ocean, and many more suffered serious illnesses. When the ship arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, Newton delivered these men, women, and children into a life of toil and oppression while he sat in church services and took leisurely strolls through fields and woods outside Charleston.

It is not as difficult to see the mess in others' lives as it is to see the mess in our own. For years, Newton had no notion that slavery was evil—few Christians of his day did. That makes me wonder how blind I am to the cultural deceptions of our times. What hidden sins skulk in my soul? And if I am without the awareness or language to name them, how can I change?

### An Absurd Mess

Part of our mess is not knowing we are a mess. Most of us in contemporary life have never participated in the evil of slavery, never been convicted of a felony, never abused a child. Sometimes we don't feel a pressing need for grace because we do not see our sin as particularly troublesome. Both social science and theology help explain why this is so.

A robust finding from social science research is that most people think they are better than others—more ethical, considerate, industrious, cooperative, fair, and loyal. People think they obey the Ten Commandments more consistently than others. One polling expert noted, "It's the great contradiction: the average person believes he is a better person than the average person." Sixteen centuries earlier Augustine bemoaned: "[My] sin was all the more incurable because I did not judge myself to be a sinner."

Theologians discuss the noetic effects of sin, meaning that our intellect is dulled—our eyes closed—as a result of living in a fallen state. In the narrow sense, it means we cannot reason well enough to see our need for salvation unless God, in grace, first reaches out to us. In a broader sense, it means our awareness of sin is dulled in various ways by pride.

Karl Barth, the 20th-century Swiss theologian, shows the absurdity of this sin. Our pride demonstrates how much we want to be like God. Meanwhile, God—the eternal and majestic Creator, filled with all power, knowledge, and goodness—empties himself in the form of Jesus, even to the point of a violent and horrific death on trumped-up charges. Humans are puffed up in pride as God is emptied in humility. It is absurd.

But it is nonetheless real. While pride blinds us spiritually, our defense mechanisms—the psychological armor we use to protect ourselves from seeing the truth about ourselves—keep us



in the dark, and for good reason. If we live in a world without grace, then our defense mechanisms are the only things keeping us from the precipice of despair.

### The language of sin

In this broken world, we have two options.

First, we can deny our complicity and blame others for messing up the world. In doing this, we put ourselves in the role of moral spectators, critics, or victims. In Jesus' parable of the two men praying in the temple, the religious leader says, "I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else, especially like that tax collector over there! For I never cheat, I don't sin, I don't commit adultery, I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income." This is the path of self-deception.

The second option is to dare to believe that God is gracious and to admit our sin. In Jesus' parable, the tax collector does not even risk raising his eyes to heaven, but beats his chest and cries out, "O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner" (Luke 18:13). This is the path of hope, the journey of Lent that leads toward Easter.

We are sorely tempted to take the first option. I do sometimes. I am usually nice to my students, treat my colleagues fairly, deeply love those in my family, pay my taxes, provide psychological help to pastors in crisis, go to church, and tithe. I don't steal, commit adultery, use illegal drugs, or swear. And I floss regularly. When I was younger, I would gladly sing, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound" and then remain uncomfortably silent for the next six words. I was no wretch, that was for sure.

But when I look at myself honestly, I see my sin. I micromanage, consume more than my share of resources, and harbor bitterness from past losses. I hoard my time and resent others for intruding on it. I am vain and consumed with how others perceive me. I wrestle with my sexuality and have strayed away from Lisa, my wife, with my eyes and my heart. I have learned how to pretend to listen without really listening. I think more about being great than about being good. I act more spiritual than I am. I am a mess—broken in every way—and my only hope is in God's mercy.

I have been socialized in a therapeutic language that proclaims "I'm okay, you're okay." Our culture is fascinated with the cult of self-esteem, as if this is the path to self-acceptance and the ultimate experience of love. Many have become adept at polishing the steel of the defensive armor, but the inner self still longs for love more than self-love, for grace more than impression management, for authenticity more than admiration. Beneath the armor of our pride, we live as vulnerable men and women longing to be loved and known. Our hope is found in cautiously shedding the armor and clinging to the possibility of amazing grace.

### Slow Change Coming

In the parable of the prodigal son, who looked longingly at the pods he was feeding to pigs, Jesus says that "he finally came to his senses" (Luke 15:17).

We each have moments of coming to our senses. It may happen while sitting in a counselor's office, participating in a worship service, or praying quietly. Some people come to their senses while scooping pig slop; others are encompassed in the warm embrace of a lover. The moment may start as a gentle nudging, wisps of renewal coming as a gentle summer breeze. Or it may knock us over like a coastal hurricane. We might be alone or sitting in the midst of thousands. In every season and every place God keeps pursuing us, wooing us home, bringing us back to our senses.

Like most of us, Newton came to his senses slowly. While in Charleston, Newton began writing letters and journal entries that showed pity for his human cargo. God was working in his heart. Newton returned to England, married, and . . . no, he still did not change.

Allowed to captain his own ships, he continued to steal and sell human lives for several more years. In his journal, Newton even wrote that being the captain of a slave ship was optimal for “promoting the Life of God in the Soul.” Newton’s slave trading might have continued for many more years except for a seizure that made a career change medically necessary. In all, Newton spent 10 years trading slaves, most of them *after* his conversion to Christianity.

Newton’s biography was not the story I expected, yet it is hauntingly similar to my Christian journey. We fall short of God’s desire for our lives. Our disordered passions do not suddenly become ordered with a flash of insight or a spiritual awakening. Sanctification is a lifelong calling, an epic journey. It was not until many years later that Newton could write, “[I] was blind but now I see.”

Newton became a customs officer, studied theology, and eventually—despite feelings of unworthiness because of his past sins—became a minister. As Newton’s eyes opened more fully with each passing year, he became horrified at his sin. One of his friends later recalled that he never spent 30 minutes with Newton without hearing the former captain’s remorse for trading slaves. It was always on his mind, nagging his conscience while reminding him of his utter dependence on God’s forgiving grace. In one of Newton’s letters to a member of Parliament, he described the slave trade as “a millstone, sufficient, of itself sufficient, to sink such an enlightened and highly favour’d nation as ours to the bottom of the sea.”

Seeing our sin occurs over a lifetime of pursuing God. Our vision is seldom restored in a single burst of light but with countless rays streaming into our darkened eyes over many years—and always in the midst of amazing grace. At the end of his life Newton said to his friends, “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior.”

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.” Now I sing it out—the whole line.

*—Mark R. McMinn is the Dr. Arthur P. Rech and Mrs. Jean May Rech Professor of Psychology at Wheaton College. This article is an excerpt from Why Sin Matters: The Surprising Relationship between God’s Grace and Our Sin (Tyndale, 2004).*

“Amazing Sin, How Deep We’re Bound,” by Mark R. McMinn, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, May 2004

# THE CROSS AND OUR GUILT

Since Jesus died for our sins, should we still feel guilt?

**S**ome people struggle with guilt; others have simply learned to live with it. Philip Yancey says there's a better way for believers to handle guilt. It can even work for us as we seek to grow in Christ's likeness.

In this study we'll ask, "If God forgets our sins, why can't we? Or should we?"



**Scripture:** 1 Timothy 1:15–20; Hebrews 10:1–3, 10, 14, 15–22; 1 John 1:6–9

**Based on:** The article "Guilt Good and Bad," by Philip Yancey, *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, November 2002



# The Cross and the Resurrection

## THE CROSS AND OUR GUILT

Leader's Guide

### Part 1 **IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE**

*Note to leader: Provide each person with the CHRISTIANITY TODAY article "Guilt Good and Bad," included at the end of this study.*

Philip Yancey understands guilt. From his strict, religious childhood he learned much about his sinfulness. Only after many years of reflection could he report that some of his childhood experiences were helpful. Yancey says some of his guilt has a purpose.

#### **Discussion Starters:**

**[Q]** What are the sources of your guilt?

- Which of these do you think are legitimate?

**[Q]** How do parents use guilt?

- Do you see parallels between a human parent's use of guilt and God's use of guilt with us? Why or why not?

**[Q]** Do you think Menken's caricature of the Puritan survives in our coarse society? Do you know anyone like that?

**[Q]** How does your background affect your present tendency to feel guilty?

### Part 2 **DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES**

Pastor, professor, and author Calvin Miller tells a story from his youth that wonderfully illustrates our need to feel forgiven:

Revival in my own life has been brought together by the connection of two events—first, by a character . . . who stepped onto a Broadway stage and, dressed in blue jeans and a T-shirt, cried, "I wanna get washed!" It was the beginning of *Godspell*, and it spoke to a double hunger. We all want to get washed, and we all want to be in the presence of God. According to the old cry, we want to "Get washed—the kingdom of God is at hand!"

The second event came when I bucked hay bales in northern Oklahoma. By nightfall these little alfalfa "groaties" would be fused to my skin with sweat—those itching, ugly, hayfield microbes, gargantuan chiggers that gnawed at you like fanged fire ants, which bit through the dermis and stung like cornered scorpions. It was hard to lead us hayfield workers to Christ—we could hardly be threatened with hell. For we who suffered the



## The Cross and the Resurrection

# THE CROSS AND OUR GUILT

### Leader's Guide

hayfield groaties lost all fear of purgatory. In the fiery itch of our days, we scratched and dreamed of only one thing: the evening shower.

We had rigged an old barrel under the windmill and set it high on a two-by-four framework. It stood up in the Oklahoma sun all day long, warming until it was ready for field hands to stand beneath its generous flow and be clean. Its walls were corrugated tin on three sides, but the fourth side was open wide to the setting sun. We stood in the water like Adam in Eden. We would face the west and rebuke the field demons, "In the name of Jesus Christ, get off of us, you dogs of hell!" Then we'd turn the tap and sing, "Just as I am" as the water flowed, and we were born again! And if any one of you asked me on any late June day what I most wanted in life, I would have said, "O God, I wanna get washed!"

(From the sermon, "I Wanna Get Washed," PREACHINGTODAY, tape 118)

Many Christians can identify with this feeling of wanting to be washed. People who have a dramatic conversion experience can well relate to the before and after feelings of dirty and clean. But many Christians suffer from the nagging feeling that they're still dirty or that they've gotten dirty again. That nagging feeling is called guilt.

### **Teaching Point One: Jesus made us holy by his sacrifice for us, but we still feel guilt.**

Read Hebrews 10:1–3, 10, 14.

Why do we feel guilt? We can answer this question from two perspectives: historic and personal.

The writer of Hebrews raises the issue of a clean conscience when he describes the need for the sacrificial system. God gave instructions to the Hebrews for their sacrifices, only to say that the sacrifices were unnecessary after Jesus' death. So why then did he institute sacrifices in the first place?

The sacrifice of unblemished, firstborn animals and of the best crops provided a means for restoring the broken relationship between humans and God. The restoration was temporary, however, because humans would sin again. Feelings of guilt would often signal that broken relationship. These feelings served as a warning that sin had again become a barrier in the person's relationship with God. If heeded, these feelings would spur the repentant person to sacrifice so that the relationship with God would be restored again.

The writer of Hebrews speaks particularly to the cyclical nature of sacrifice: sin, guilt, sacrifice, restoration, sin again. The worshipers' guilty feelings in verse 2 are often the goad in this



## The Cross and the Resurrection

# THE CROSS AND OUR GUILT

### Leader's Guide

cycle. But whether people felt guilty or not, they knew they were objectively guilty because of the law. But the systematic sacrifices that lasted for 1,500 years served to show over time the futility of the system. A final sacrifice was needed, a perfect sacrifice that would put the penitent person in right relationship with God for all time.

That sacrifice was Jesus (v. 10).

Through Jesus, we have been made holy once for all.

**[Q]** If that is the case, why do we still feel guilty?

**[Q]** Some would suggest it's psychological: we were taught to feel guilty. Or it may be that guilt is part of our fallen nature. After all, we are guilty of sin on a daily basis. Yancey says guilt is symptomatic. In your experience, of what is guilt symptomatic?

Hebrews 10 offers some insight into the tension between being forgiven and feeling guilty. In verse 14, the author says, "For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy." Consider the distinction between "has made perfect forever" and "being made holy." We had our relationship with God restored through faith in Jesus Christ, our once-for-all-time sacrifice, at the time of our salvation. That is a completed action, whereas being remade in his image is ongoing. It will continue for the remainder of our earthly lives. Justification is complete; sanctification is ongoing.

Therefore, guilt feelings serve a different purpose for believers. They are not meant to spur us to salvation but to encourage our sanctification. Guilt can cause us to grow. The issue for us becomes one of balance.

**[Q]** Yancey describes guilt's extremes: unbearable uncertainty whether one's sins are forgiven, and forgetting one ever sinned in the first place. Do you tend toward one of these extremes? Explain.

**[Q]** Respond to this statement by one of Martin Luther's confessors: "My son, God is not angry with you: it is you who are angry with God." Why would Luther have been angry with God? How did extreme guilt indicate this anger?

**[Q]** Yancey says Luther eventually agreed that his fear of sinning showed a lack of faith. But is cautious concern about sin a good moral defense? Why or why not?

### Teaching Point Two: God forgets our sins.

Read Hebrews 10:15–22.



## The Cross and the Resurrection

# THE CROSS AND OUR GUILT

### Leader's Guide

God told Israel through the prophet Jeremiah how its relationship with him would be changed once Jesus was sacrificed. These verses from Jeremiah 31 were quoted by the writer of Hebrews (10:16–18) to explain that it was the sacrifice of Jesus that facilitated the new covenant, one in which God made a tremendous promise: he would remember his people's sins and lawless acts no more.

God's intentional forgetfulness, whereby he no longer holds our sins against us, is a feature of the new covenant. Rather than an agreement written on stone tablets, this is a covenant that changes minds and hearts. God writes his law on the minds and hearts of his people, meaning that our relationship with God is both binding and life-changing. By writing his own character on our hearts and minds, God is rewriting our character. He is recreating us in his image.

This act has an effect on God, too. God does not want his people's past record to affect his relationship with them, so it is expunged. Like a juvenile whose court record is sometimes purged after the sentence is completed, a believer's sentence is declared finished as God wipes out the record. He will not hold it against us. In this sense, our sins and lawless acts are forgotten.

David used poetic language to describe God's act of separating us from our sins: "As far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12). It is God's desire to forgive us in this way: "As a father has compassion on his children" (Ps. 103:13). "Let the wicked forsake their ways . . . Let them turn to the Lord . . . for he will freely pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

Behind David's plea for forgiveness after his adultery with Bathsheba is the certainty that God will forgive: "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10). And David attests to one outcome of a renewed spirit: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation" (Ps. 51:12).

Even David, 1,000 years before the crucifixion of Jesus, pointed out the futility of repeated sacrifices. David knew God wanted more than animals laid on the pyre: "You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise" (Ps. 51:16–17).

**[Q]** From David's example, what is the difference between guilt and sorrow?

- Between guilt and contrition?
- How did guilt work to David's good?

We Protestants (generally) do not have the confessional booth as part of our religious practice. Some people say it is easier to confess to another human being than to the invisible



## The Cross and the Resurrection

# THE CROSS AND OUR GUILT

### Leader's Guide

but all-knowing God. The person confessing can still hide things from another person, but God knows all. That is a scary thought for sin-shamed humans. But we should be encouraged that God's omniscience also means he knows the extent of our forgiveness and the price he paid to draw us unto himself. One thing greater than our sin is his forgiveness, and the love that drives it.

A pastor once described the silence between the corporate prayer of confession and the declaration "In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven" as almost unbearable. That silence, while waiting for assurance of forgiveness, describes the life of the perpetually guilty. How can Protestants obtain absolution in a way that makes us more sure of the forgiveness of God?

Read 1 John 1:6–9.

The invitation to confession is always open. God is waiting to forgive those who confess their sins, and he promises he will forgive. It's his nature.

Confession for the believer serves several purposes: it frees us from the delusion that we are sinless; it draws us closer to God and to fellow believers; and it sets "our hearts at rest in his presence" (1 John 3:19). In other words, we are freed from guilt; our consciences are cleansed. Even when our hearts condemn us, God knows the greater truth about us: we are forgiven, cleansed, and welcome in his presence (see Heb. 10:19–22).

### **Teaching Point Three: God forgets our sins, but sometimes we need to remember them.**

Read 1 Timothy 1:15–20.

The letter to the Hebrews tells us the value of a clean conscience. Paul emphasized that in his first letter to Timothy, too, but he added that we shouldn't forget the reason we needed cleansing.

Paul is not proud of his sinful past nor does he sound guilt-ridden, but he remembers his own sinfulness, calling himself "chief" among sinners. It proves God's mercy, he says. Paul's admonition to Timothy in verse 19 to hold to a good conscience is dependent on that point. Many believers are weighed down by guilt, and it renders them useless in the battle against evil. Our qualification to "fight the good fight" is not our goodness, but God's. Likewise, our good conscience is not simply because we have confessed but because God has forgiven. God had a kingdom purpose for Timothy (note "prophecies" in verse 18), but the young minister's purpose could only be fulfilled if he held fast to the faith and to his good conscience. The same is true for us. Our remembrance of our sins is only for our testimony. The over-guilty are rendered powerless by their failings. The appropriately guilty are empowered by God's forgiveness.



# The Cross and the Resurrection

## THE CROSS AND OUR GUILT

### Leader's Guide

**[Q]** The saints, Yancey says, have a “finely calibrated sense of sin . . . they live in full awareness of falling short” but “true saints do not get discouraged over their faults.” How is that possible?

**[Q]** What do you think of Yancey’s statement: “What is forgotten can never be healed”? If God forgets our sins, why shouldn’t we?

### Part 3 **APPLY YOUR FINDINGS**

**Action Point:** *If you are burdened by false guilt, how can you move past that guilt? If you have stifled guilt in your soul, how can you get in touch with it again so that you can face up to your sin?*

— *Study prepared by Eric Reed, formerly LEADERSHIP JOURNAL’s managing editor.*

### **RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

#### **ChristianBibleStudies.com**

- **Matthew: The Passion Week** (6-session course)
- **Easter Week: Sacrifice and Salvation** (4-session course)
- **The Cross** (single study)
- **The Passion of the Christ** (movie discussion guide)

 **Holiness By Grace**, by Bryan Chappell (Crossway Books, 2003)

 **Saved From What?** by R. C. Sproul (Crossway Books, 2002)

 **Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Salvation**, by Barbara Brown Taylor (Cowley Publications, 2001)

 **Whatever Became of Sin?** by Karl Menninger (E. P. Dutton, 1973)

 **What’s So Amazing About Grace?** by Philip Yancey (Zondervan, 2002)



# The Cross and the Resurrection

## **GUILT GOOD AND BAD**

Article



### **Guilt Good and Bad**

*The early warning signs.*

By Philip Yancey

“Love means never having to say you’re sorry,” proclaimed a sappy romance novel from the 1970s. I have come to believe the opposite, that love means precisely having to say you’re sorry. A sense of guilt, vastly underappreciated, deserves our gratitude, for only such a powerful force can nudge us toward repentance and reconciliation with those we have harmed.

Yet guilt represents danger as well. In his novel *The First Circle*, Alexander Solzhenitsyn described a prisoner who obsessively marked a pink sheet of paper for every bad thought or “defect.” I have known Christians who go through life with hyperattention to defects. Some raised in oppressive environments go through life afraid, heads down, fleeing anything that might be perceived as pleasure, and terrified that they are somehow offending one of God’s laws.

Martin Luther, in his early days as a monk, would daily wear out his confessors with as many as six straight hours of introspection about minuscule sins and unhealthy thoughts. “My son, God is not angry with you: it is you who are angry with God,” said one of his exasperated advisers. Luther eventually came to agree that his fear of sinning actually showed a lack of faith, both in his ability to live purely in an impure world, and in Christ’s provision for his sin. “To diagnose smallpox you do not have to probe each pustule, nor do you heal each separately,” he concluded.

H. L. Mencken’s caricature of a Puritan—“a person with a haunting fear that someone, somewhere is happy”—hints at how far the church or society can stray from God’s standards of right and wrong. Jesus himself was criticized by the “Puritans” of his day. A mature Christian learns to discriminate between false guilt inherited from parents, church, or society, and true guilt as a response to breaking God’s laws clearly revealed in the Bible.

A second danger flows directly from the first. Guilt, like physical pain, is directional. Just as the body speaks to us in the language of pain so that we will attend to the injury site, the spirit speaks to us in the language of guilt so that we will take the steps necessary for healing. The goal in both is to restore health.

In his book *Legends of our Time*, Elie Wiesel tells of a visit to his hometown of Sighet, which was then part of Hungary. Twenty years before his visit, Wiesel and all other Jews in that town had been rounded up and deported to concentration camps. To his dismay, he found that the current residents of the town had simply erased the memory of those Jews. It struck Wiesel that forgetting one’s sins may be as great an evil as committing them in the first place, for what is forgotten can never be healed.

Guilt is not a state to cultivate, like a mood you slip into for a few days. It should have directional movement, first pointing backward to the sin and then pointing forward to repentance.

In my reading of spiritual masters, I have noticed that persons we now view as saintly have a finely calibrated sense of sin. Aware of God’s ideal, aspiring to holiness, free of the vanity and defensiveness that blind most people, they live in full awareness of falling short. Thomas Merton makes this point in an odd comparison between Adolf Hitler and Theresa of Avila:

Saint Theresa thinks everybody is the same as she is because we are all sinners. Hitler thinks everybody is different from him, because they are, some of them less pure, some of them less



## The Cross and the Resurrection

# **GUILT GOOD AND BAD**

Article

noble, some of them less intelligent, some of them less beautiful, all of them less godlike, all of them less perfect. It is the Hitlers who think they are perfect—because nobody else thinks so. It is the saints who know they are not perfect, although sometimes other people say of them that they are saints: the saints themselves know themselves only as sinners, liable to lose their love and the sight of Christ through a movement of impatience or selfishness or pride.

True saints do not get discouraged over their faults, for they recognize that a person who feels no guilt can never find healing. Paradoxically, neither can a person who wallows in guilt. The sense of guilt only serves its designed purpose if it presses us toward the God who promises forgiveness and restoration.

I once thought Christians went through life burdened by guilt, in contrast to carefree unbelievers. I now realize that Christians are the only persons who do not have to go through life feeling guilty. Guilt is only a symptom; we listen to it because it drives us toward the cure.

“Guilt Good and Bad,” by Philip Yancey, *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, November 2002



# ENCOUNTERS WITH THE RISEN LORD

Jesus encounters individuals in unique ways that allow them to recognize him as the risen Lord.

**H**e has risen! He is not here." The risen Christ appeared to his followers in different ways, demonstrating his care for their uniqueness. He continues to meet people in distinctive ways today. "God comes to us in various ways, accommodating our pain, fear, doubt, abstraction, and pride," says John Witte Jr. in his article for *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*.

In what unique ways did Jesus meet his followers after his resurrection? How did his appearances demonstrate his consideration of their life experiences, emotional fragility, and individual personalities? How does Jesus meet people today? How do we respond with grace to other believers who experience Christ in ways that are unfamiliar to us?

**Scripture:** Luke 24:36–49; John 10:2–6; 20; 21

**Based on:** The article "A Manifold Resurrection," by John Witte Jr., *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, April 2007



## Part 1 **IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE**

*Note to leader: Provide each person with the CHRISTIANITY TODAY article "A Manifold Resurrection," included at the end of this study.*

God formed each of us uniquely and meets each of us in the ways that our individual souls will best respond to. He knows our every thought and emotion and meets us where we are. Witte says, "Christ can be experienced in multiple forms and multiple forums, and we respond to him individually and collectively in multiple ways." Each encounter with God is personal and individually tailored for our good and his glory.

We will not experience God in exactly the same way as others. When we recognize this truth, we will better appreciate the diversity of ways in which Christ meets us individually and in the church. When we recognize God's creative nature and diverse methods, we are able to offer grace to each other to worship and experience God in different ways. This allows us to focus on the fundamental unity of salvation in Christ while embracing the truth that God makes himself known through a variety of unique and fascinating methods.

### **Discussion Starters:**

**[Q]** In what ways does God meet you personally?

- How does God meet you in corporate worship?

**[Q]** How do different denominations of Christianity express unique forms of worship?

- Are you uncomfortable with unfamiliar styles of worship? Why or why not?

**[Q]** Why do you think we are sometimes tempted to believe that the only legitimate encounters with Christ are the ones we have personally experienced?

- How does this demonstrate our limited understanding of God's greatness and creativity?

## Part 2 **DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES**

**Teaching Point One: Jesus confronts our false assumptions, calls us by name, and comforts us in grief.**

Read John 10:2–6 and 20:1–18. Bewildered and terrified, Mary went quickly to tell Peter and John that someone had taken Christ's body out of the tomb, and she didn't know where they had put him. The apostles ran to the tomb, saw the evidence to support Mary's claims, and

returned home. In their preoccupation, they left Mary weeping at the tomb. Feeling alone, bereft, and confused, Mary could not shake her misconceptions and the preconceived idea that someone had stolen Christ's body.

But Mary was one of Christ's precious lambs. She was the first of his followers to whom he appeared after his resurrection. At first she did not recognize him, but when he spoke her name, she knew him. By calling her name, Jesus led her to the truth of his resurrection. Mary cried out in instantaneous joy and overwhelming relief. She fell at the feet of her Savior and worshiped.

Jesus desires to break down our misconceptions and false ideas so that we can know the truth, just as he demonstrated the truth of his resurrection to Mary. When pain blinds us to his presence, he calls us by name and tells us that we are his own. He longs to come to us when we are weeping with sorrow and grief. His presence brings us comfort. By his Word, he strengthens us to do his will, just as he strengthened Mary to fulfill his purpose in her life.

**[Q]** Why do you think Jesus appeared to Mary before he appeared to any of his other followers?

- Why do you think Jesus met Mary alone instead of appearing when Peter and John also were at the tomb?

**[Q]** Mary believed Christ's body was taken away. Her misconception kept her from recognizing Jesus. How can preconceived ideas about God keep us from recognizing him in our lives?

**[Q]** Mary did not recognize Jesus, even when he spoke to her. Why do you think she knew him when he called her by name?

- How does God call us by name today?

**[Q]** What evidence in this passage suggests that Mary's grief paralyzed her?

- How did Jesus help her?
- Share a time that God met you when you were paralyzed with grief.

**[Q]** How did Mary's physical demeanor, emotional response, and spiritual well-being change when she recognized her risen Lord?

- How did Jesus change her thinking and help her to understand the truth about his resurrection?

**Teaching Point Two: Jesus calms our fears and breathes his peace upon us.**

Read John 20:19–23 and Luke 24:36–49. Confused about Jesus' death, the disciples huddled together behind bolted doors in fear of the Jews and the Romans. "Peace be with you," Jesus announced as he suddenly appeared to the startled and frightened group. Jesus assured them that he was not a ghost. He let them touch his hands and feet to prove that he was flesh and bone. He further demonstrated that he was a resurrected body, not just a spirit, by eating in their presence. Once the disciples were at peace, Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. He then breathed on them, promising the coming of the Holy Spirit, who would clothe them with power from on high.

Sometimes we are locked behind doors of fear that keep us from boldly accomplishing all that God has for us. In our anxiety, Jesus meets us and breathes his peace upon us to calm our anxious thoughts and hearts. The reminder of the risen Christ's victory over death emboldens our faith.

**[Q]** The barrier of locked doors did not stop Jesus from meeting the disciples. How did Jesus bypass the barrier of their fear?

- Why were his first words, "Peace be with you"?

**[Q]** How did Jesus prove that he was not just a spirit?

- Why was it important for the disciples to understand that Jesus had a resurrected body and that he was not a ghost?

**Leader's Note:** *It proved that he had risen from the dead and that he had victory over death.*

**[Q]** How did Christ's presence turn the disciples' fear into joy?

- Share a time when God's presence replaced your fear with peace and joy.

**[Q]** Why did Jesus first deal with the disciples' fear before he explained the Scriptures to them?

- How might fear keep us from understanding God's truth?

**[Q]** How is the Holy Spirit related to peace?

- Is peace possible without the Holy Spirit? Why or why not?

**[Q]** Why do you think Jesus once again said, "Peace be with you," as he gave the disciples final instructions?

- How do we attain peace? Give practical steps.

**Teaching Point Three: Jesus relieves our doubts and skepticism by allowing us to experience him in a personal way.**

Read John 20:24–31. “We have seen the Lord!” The disciples shared this joyous news with Thomas, but Thomas would not believe them. Thomas refused to believe the resurrection account until he could touch the wounds of Jesus caused by the crucifixion. Thomas needed to see Jesus with his own eyes and touch him with his own hands.

Each of us must experience Jesus personally. Other people's stories of how God has appeared in their lives can encourage us, but not until we experience God for ourselves can we firmly and truly believe. Jesus counters our doubts with his Word and his abiding presence.

**[Q]** Jesus did not come to Thomas for an entire week after his strong statement of skepticism. Why do you think Jesus waited a week?

- What might Thomas's thoughts and emotions have been during this waiting time?
- God does not always work on our timetable. Share an example of when you have had to wait for God to reveal himself to you.

**[Q]** Jesus had already visited the disciples, but he visited them again in much the same way as before. This time, however, Thomas was present. Jesus addressed him individually. What does this tell you about how well Jesus knew Thomas's thoughts and emotions?

- How did Jesus demonstrate compassionate care for Thomas?
- What does this tell us about Jesus' willingness to allay our doubts?

**[Q]** What was Jesus' attitude toward Thomas's disbelief? How did Jesus respond to Thomas's demand for proof? Why do you think he responded in this way?

**[Q]** The Book of James says he who doubts is like a wave in the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. Witte says that Jesus “assured and anchored” Thomas. How has Jesus assured and anchored you when you felt storm-tossed by doubts?

**Teaching Point Four: Jesus strengthens our faith through forgiveness, miracles, and challenge.**

Read John 21. Jesus stood on the shore, and the disciples' net was miraculously filled with fish after a long, frustrating night of catching nothing. “It is the Lord!” John announced. Peter immediately jumped out of the boat and began to wade through the water toward Jesus, most likely thinking of his denial of Christ during Jesus' darkest hours and wanting to make it right. “Come and have breakfast,” Jesus called. When they had finished eating, Jesus assured Peter of his love and forgiveness. He also helped Peter deal with his own doubts about his love for Christ

in light of his previous denial. Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him—the same number of times Peter had denied him. Possibly, Peter was more resolved and convinced of his love for Jesus each time he answered the Lord, though the questions hurt him.

Jesus told Peter to care for his sheep. Peter later told the elders of the church to shepherd the flock (1 Pet. 5:2), using the same analogy Jesus had used with him. Peter took Jesus' command to heart and resolved to be courageous from then on. Jesus' gentle yet persistent questions prodded Peter to unflinchingly proclaim his faith.

**[Q]** Why do you think Jesus provided this miraculous catch of fish?

- What was the significance of the net not being broken?
- Why does God provide miracles?

**Leader's Note:** *God does miracles for his own glory and to strengthen our faith.*

**[Q]** When Jesus initially called the disciples, he said to them, "Follow me" (John 1:43). What was the significance of Jesus once again telling Peter, "Follow me"?

**[Q]** Why might Peter have doubted his love for Jesus? Why was it important for Peter to remember that he loved Jesus?

**[Q]** How did Jesus demonstrate his love and forgiveness to Peter?

**[Q]** How did Jesus challenge Peter to ministry?

- Peter reiterated Jesus' command to care for the sheep when he later addressed the elders of the church. What does this say about the impact that Peter's encounter with the risen Lord had on his later ministry?
- How has your encounter with the risen Lord affected the ways you minister to others?

### **Optional Activities:**

*1. List other ways God has revealed himself to people according to the Bible. Pay special consideration to unique revelations such as Moses and the burning bush.*

*2. Interview people from different churches to see how God meets them in ways that are new or unfamiliar to you.*

### Part 3 **APPLY YOUR FINDINGS**

God created us. He knows how each of us will best respond to him. Just as he met Mary in her grief and despair, he will meet us as the comforter of our souls. As he met the frightened disciples behind locked doors, he will breathe his peace on us, overcoming our barriers of fear. When we are full of skepticism, he reveals himself to us in personal ways that allay our doubts. When we have denied our God, he extends forgiveness and offers restored fellowship. How mighty and awesome is our God who meets us in unique and wonderful ways.

As the body of Christ, the church will increase in joy and amazement at God's creative nature when we are open and accepting of the fact that he may meet others in ways that are different from the ways he meets us. God's diversity allows for multiple forms of experience. We must allow each other the grace to experience God in ways that are powerful and meaningful.

**[Q]** Consider how Christ's followers responded to his resurrection. What should be our souls' response to the resurrection of Christ?

**[Q]** Why do you think God meets different people in different ways?

- Why do you think he meets various congregations in different ways?

**[Q]** How does diversity glorify God?

**[Q]** Which of the accounts of the risen Lord meeting his people was most meaningful to you? Why?

**Action Point:** *Spend some time remembering how God has worked in your life. As a group, make a list of ways that God has met you personally and collectively in the body of Christ. Spend time in prayer, praising God for his goodness in meeting each of us in ways that are personally meaningful.*

— Study prepared by Julie Kloster, speaker, freelance writer, and regular contributor to [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com)

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

### [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com)

- [Matthew: The Passion Week](#) (6-session course)
- [Easter Week: Sacrifice and Salvation](#) (4-session course)
- [The Cross](#) (single study)
- [The Passion of the Christ](#) (movie discussion guide)
- [Church Unity Myths](#) (single study)

 [Diversity in Faith—Unity in Christ](#), Shirley Guthrie (Westminster/John Knox, 1986; ISBN 0664240135)

 [God—Mystery—Diversity](#), Gordon Kaufman (Augsburg/Fortress, 1996; ISBN 0800629590)

 [Living the Resurrection: The Risen Christ in Everyday Life](#), Eugene H. Peterson (NavPress, 2006; ISBN 157683929x)

 [Resurrection](#), Mark Rutland (Creation House, 2006; ISBN 1591859514)

 [The Resurrection of the Son of God](#), N. T. Wright (Augsburg/Fortress, 2003; ISBN 0800636155)

 [Spurgeon's Sermons on the Death and Resurrection of Jesus](#), Charles H. Spurgeon (Hendrickson Publishers; ISBN 1565638050)

# The Cross and the Resurrection

## A MANIFOLD RESURRECTION

Article



### A Manifold Resurrection

*Why the risen Jesus met people in five different ways—and still does.*

By John Witte Jr.

What strikes me about the Gospel accounts of Christmas and Easter is the varied ways in which God works. In the Incarnation, God masterminds the announcement of the good news of the birth of Christ. He sends prophets well in advance to foretell the coming of the Messiah. He commissions an angel to announce the birth to a virgin. He sets a new star in the heavens to summon wise men from the East. He sends a company of singing angels to pronounce Christ's birth to shepherds in the fields. He quickens Anna the prophetess to declare the arrival of the Messiah on his day of circumcision. Though Christ was born in a lowly manger, there was nothing quiet about his birth.

Quite the contrary with the Resurrection. Yes, an angel rolls away the stone before Jesus' tomb, but he does so quietly in the early morning hours before anyone is awake. The grand miracle takes place with little pomp and circumstance. No angels sing hymns in the heavens, no stars appear in the East, no wise men set out on pilgrimage, no prophetess pronounces the good news. For 40 days after the Resurrection, Christ flits in and out of space and time, appearing only occasionally to a few followers. Then he ascends quietly into heaven.

What is even more striking is how his followers consistently fail to recognize him, and, more importantly, the variety of ways in which God makes it possible for them to apprehend him:

- Mary Magdalene, weeping outside the empty tomb, has to be called by name before she recognizes Christ. Before that, she thought he was a gardener.
- Ten disciples, gathered in a room in sorrow and fear, need Christ to show him his hands and side before they recognize him. Before that, they thought he was a ghost.
- Two travelers from Emmaus walked with Christ and talked with him about salvation history all the way to their city, but recognized him only when he held up some bread and blessed it. Before that, they thought he was simply a learned traveler.
- Thomas, the great doubter, wanted to put his fingers in the nail holes of the Cross and his hand in the pierced side of Christ before accepting him. Prior to that, he thought Jesus' resurrection was a fraud.
- And Peter, that enigmatic rock of the church, recognized Christ only after he performed the miracle of filling fishing nets with fish—and then Peter had to sit through a threefold cross-examination as to whether he really believed in the resurrected Lord: "Simon, Barjona, do you love me?" "Do you love me?" "Do you love me?"

In these Gospel accounts, we see five ways in which Christ is experienced and understood after the Resurrection: A calling by name. A delivery of peace. A sacramental vision. A physical encounter. A miracle and conversation with God. I see both a budding psychology and a budding ecclesiology at work in these passages.

### How Christ Meets Us Personally

The Gospels record these stories of, and encounters with, the newly resurrected Christ in part for our spiritual comfort.



## The Cross and the Resurrection

# A MANIFOLD RESURRECTION

Article

There is a little bit of Mary Magdalene in all of us: times when we swoon with pain and grief and need God's call to comfort us. There is a little bit of the Emmaus travelers in all of us: times when we talk idly about divine matters but see God only in a simple and sublime sacrament. There is a little bit of the huddled disciples in all of us: times when our faith puts us in jeopardy and fear and we need God's peace to be breathed on us. There is a little bit of Thomas in all of us: times that we are so overcome by doubt and skepticism that we need God's touch to assure and anchor us. And there is a little bit of Peter in all of us: times when we betray our Lord and need a miracle to remind us of God's majesty or a divine conversation to move us to confess our faith unflinchingly.

The Gospel narratives of the resurrected Christ meet us at different stages in life and assure us that God comes to us in various ways, accommodating our pain, fear, doubt, abstraction, and pride.

### How Christ meets us in church

The Gospels also record these stories for our corporate edification, to help us appreciate the diversity of ways in which we meet Christ in the church.

Christ can be experienced in multiple forms and multiple forums, and we respond to him individually and collectively in multiple ways. Some are called by name. Some are touched by God. Some receive the breath of the Holy Spirit. Some experience miracles and hierophanies. Some see God in the sacraments.

Each type of divine encounter and experience creates its own liturgy, community, and tradition of confession, creed, and catechism.

Some traditions emphasize personal calling, a moment of rebirth before membership is sealed. Some focus on an event, an icon, or a site or rite of divine vision. Some emphasize the pulpit, the homiletic exposition of God's Word. Some emphasize the altar, the Eucharistic celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ. All are legitimate ways to serve and celebrate Christ, and all are legitimate foundations for understanding what the church is.

The Gospel stories of Christmas and Easter remind us of our fundamental unity in Christ. They also remind us of the plurality of ways God makes himself known and the variety of ways in which Christ is experienced by his people.

—John Witte Jr. is Jonas Robitscher professor of law and director of the Center for the Study of Law and Religion at Emory University. He is the author of a number of books, including *God's Joust, God's Justice: Law and Religion in Western Tradition* (Eerdmans, 2006)

"A Manifold Resurrection," by John Witte Jr., CHRISTIANITY TODAY, April 2007



# A RESURRECTION THAT MATTERS

**Our salvation before God stands on the Cross, yes. But it is also founded on something more.**

**O**ne of the hallmarks of evangelical faith is that we are cruci-centric, or “Cross-centered.” And that’s not a bad thing. Rather than focusing the Christian life on merely the example of Jesus’ life and earthly ministry, evangelicals look to his death as the *sine qua non* of our salvation. Without Jesus’ death, there is no access to heaven for sinners and no hope for lasting moral improvement. Author J. R. Daniel Kirk, in “A Resurrection That Matters,” was a leader at his InterVarsity group in college and had much the same Cross-centered outlook. Yet one Easter he came to realize that his theology was missing something very important—the Resurrection. “One day as I was walking back to my dorm,” Kirk says, “it dawned on me that the gospel as I understood it had no need for Jesus to be raised from the dead.” Does your gospel have room for the Resurrection? This study will help show you why it should.



**Scripture:** Acts 2:14–36; Romans 8:18–25; 1 Corinthians 15:12–28; Colossians 3:1–11

**Based on:** “A Resurrection That Matters,” by J. R. Daniel Kirk, CHRISTIANITY TODAY, April 2010



## Part 1 IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE

*Note to leader: Provide each person with the CHRISTIANITY TODAY article "A Resurrection That Matters," included at the end of this study.*

Christians celebrate Christmas and Easter with joy. But, truth be told, we're more into the former than the latter—and it isn't just because of the presents. The message of Christmas—"God with us"—though deep, is clear. The message of Easter—"He is risen"—though equally deep, is less clear. That's partly because Christ's resurrection is always paired with his death and rarely is considered on its own. We know the significance of his advent and his death, but Jesus' resurrection seems like an add-on—a happy circumstance, no doubt, but of limited value to us today. After all, Christians don't commonly rise from the dead, even though they are reborn spiritually. As Kirk asks, "What is so important about Easter?"

### Discussion Starters:

- [Q] What's your favorite holiday on the Christian calendar? Why?
- [Q] In a nutshell, why did Jesus rise from the dead?
- [Q] As you consider the theological significance of the Resurrection, how would you differentiate it from the death of Christ on the cross?
- [Q] What difference would you say the Resurrection has made in your life?

## Part 2 DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES

### Teaching Point One: The Resurrection enthroned Jesus as the Messiah.

At Christmas we celebrate the enfleshment of the eternal Son of God. We see his Incarnation as the only change in status of the Second Person of the Trinity. But the apostle Peter's first sermon in the Book of Acts points out that the first Easter carried with it a change in status for Jesus: enthronement. "To be God's anointed, the Christ, is to be at least in part the human descendant of David," Kirk notes. "And so we find Peter, in the first sermon preached after Jesus' resurrection, insisting on three things: (1) During his life on earth, Jesus was a man to whom God testified through wonders and miracles; (2) King David prophesied that the Messiah would be enthroned when God raised him from the dead; and (3) God has, in fact, *made* Jesus both Lord and Messiah by raising him and thereby enthroning him."

This sermon, preached before an international throng of Jewish pilgrims in Jerusalem, exalted the risen Lord and laid the foundation for the infant church's growth. Read about it in Acts 2:14–36.

**[Q]** Responding to the jibe that the divinely inspired disciples are drunk (v. 13), Peter speaks up, saying that the manifestations of the Spirit are confirmed in the prophecy of Joel (vv. 14–21). List the spiritual signs, the heavenly signs, and the prediction. Why is the Old Testament an important witness to the events in this chapter?

**[Q]** Having just described the what and the why, Peter moves on to the who (vv. 22–24). What signs attesting to who Jesus was would the hearers have been aware of?

**[Q]** In verse 23, who had a hand in the death of Christ, and why is each important?

**[Q]** Peter returns to Scripture, moving to David, from whom the Messiah would come (vv. 25–28). Is this section prophesying about Christ's death or resurrection?

- What reasons are given for David's expressions of joy?

**[Q]** Then Peter moves from David to Jesus, again using Scripture to prove his point (vv. 29–36). It's clear this Scripture does not ultimately refer to David (v. 29). What are the reasons it does refer to Jesus (vv. 30–35)?

**Optional Activity:** *The focus of Peter's sermon was explaining who Christ is by talking about the Resurrection. Ask the group how they have shared the gospel with someone. What methods have they used? What worked and what didn't? How might they use the Resurrection to share Christ? Role play such a situation.*

## Teaching Point Two: Jesus' resurrection guarantees ours.

In George Frederic Handel's magnificent Messiah symphony (played during Christmas and Easter), the great composer quotes from 1 Corinthians 15, the great New Testament chapter on the Resurrection. "Now is Christ risen from the dead," sings the choir, ". . . the firstfruits of them that [sleep]." By "firstfruits" Paul means that Jesus is "the first of many others who would be raised from the dead."<sup>1</sup>

Kirk explains the connection this way: "God has promised future embodied life on a new earth. The only way to take hold of this promise is to be joined to the resurrected Lord. Christian hope is more than wishful thinking, because the future on which we have set our hearts has already begun with Jesus' resurrection. He is now what we shall be."

Read 1 Corinthians 15:12–28.

## A RESURRECTION THAT MATTERS

In the fractious church at Corinth, some were claiming that there is no bodily resurrection for followers of Christ (v. 12). Paul carefully shows the Corinthians, and us, that just as Christ was raised physically, so we too will be raised physically. It's a package deal. Instead of arguing philosophically, however, that we will be raised, Paul points to the empty tomb. How, he asks, can we think our future state will be any different from what happened to Jesus?

[Q] Why is our future state linked to Jesus' resurrection (vv. 12–13)?

[Q] What are the consequences for us if Christ has not been raised (vv. 14–18)?

[Q] Verse 20 calls Christ the “firstfruits.” Explain what the following passages tell you about what this means: Exodus 23:19; Leviticus 23:10; Deuteronomy 18:4; and Nehemiah 10:35.

[Q] In vv. 21–22, the contrast is between the effect of Adam's choice (death) and the effect of Christ's, which undoes the curse (life). It is a fresh start. How does this perspective help you as you contemplate your own death or that of a loved one?

[Q] Next Paul sketches out the order of this fresh start for believers (vv. 23–28): Christ rises, Christ rules, Christ comes and raises his people, Christ destroys all false powers (including death), Christ delivers the kingdom to the Father. How does this narrative place the Resurrection in context? What is the ultimate goal?

### Teaching Point Three: The resurrection will encompass Creation in the future, allowing us to bear up under suffering now.

As implied above, God's fresh start is not some ethereal, disembodied Platonic existence. It includes the world around us. “The future for which we long and hope is the moment when God recreates this world and populates it with renewed, embodied people,” Kirk writes. “Resurrection tells us that a new creation is coming. The resurrection of Jesus tells us that this new creation has already begun.” How does this perspective of the future change the way we live now, especially with regard to the persistent suffering we face in our fallen world?

Read Romans 8:18–25.

[Q] Paul says the sufferings of the present are not worth comparing with the coming glory (v. 18). Describe a time when you trained hard and won an athletic competition, or studied hard and aced a test or won an award. Was all the sweat worth it? What made the effort bearable?

[Q] We often hear the world around us called “nature” or “the environment.” Paul, however, calls it “creation,” emphasizing its relation to the Creator and his purposes (v. 19). What does this passage tell us about creation and our relationship with it?



[Q] Why was creation subjected to futility? What does this encompass, and who did it (vv. 20–21)?

[Q] Where is creation headed? How does this knowledge of the future inform our care for the world around us today?

[Q] Paul uses a vivid picture to describe the current time of waiting (vv. 22–23): groaning with the pains of childbirth. If you've experienced childbirth, how did pain and pleasure go together?

- How might that relate to our future bodily resurrection and the restoration of creation?

[Q] How do hope and patience work together in these in-between times (vv. 24–25).

## Teaching Point Four: Our resurrection begins today.

Yet the story for Christians is not all about waiting. In some sense the resurrection has already started to break in. "In 2 Corinthians 5," Kirk says, "Paul places followers of Jesus within a new creation that has already begun: '... the old has gone, the new has come!' This is the reality brought about by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The old powers have been defeated, the old self has been crucified, and the futility of creation is being undone. A new king is lord, the new self has been raised, and the creation is catching a glimpse of an eternity with hope." Read Colossians 3:1–11, in which Paul teases out the implications of this already-but-not-yet paradox.

[Q] According to verses 1–4, what are we told to seek? Why are we told to do it? What is our ultimate reward?

[Q] Make a list of the various commands (vv. 5, 8–10). Which are negative, and which are positive?

[Q] What are the reasons given for this new focus (vv. 6–7, 11)? How many involve God, and how many involve us?

## Part 3 APPLY YOUR FINDINGS

The resurrection is no mere add-on to our faith as followers of Christ. The resurrection, already experienced by Jesus and promised to his people, is central. Without it, we have no hope for the future. With it, our current lives can be transformed. So the resurrection happens then, now, and later; yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Though Jesus was the incarnate Son of God, he was enthroned as the messianic Lord and King by virtue of his resurrection, confirming the Bible's ancient witness. The resurrection of Jesus also guarantees our eventual resurrection because we are united to him as the second Adam. And this resurrection has global reach, pointing us to the ultimate transformation of creation while encouraging us to stand firm amid suffering. Finally, because our resurrection is a settled (but not yet realized) fact, we can begin to live as if we are already raised, saying no to sin and yes to God.

The resurrected Jesus provides us with our marching orders. Kirk says, "Only after being raised from the dead can Jesus say, 'All authority has been given to me; *therefore*, go!' From his first appearance to Mary in the garden to his last appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus, when the resurrected Jesus appears, he almost always sends. The vocation and mission of the church as a sent people depends on the resurrected Jesus as our sender." Jesus has raised us; are we ready?

**Action Point:** *List all the miracles of Jesus you can think of that attest to who he is. In an extended time of prayer, praise him as Lord and Christ for each one.*

— *Stan Guthrie is author of Missions in the Third Millennium: 21 Key Trends for the 21st Century and of the forthcoming All That Jesus Asks: How His Questions Can Teach and Transform Us (Baker). A CT editor at large, he writes a column for [BreakPoint.org](http://BreakPoint.org) and blogs at [stanguthrie.com](http://stanguthrie.com).*

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

 [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com)

- For more studies on the Resurrection, go to [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com):  
<http://bit.ly/aH04tN>.

 **Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church**, N. T. Wright (HarperOne, 2008). Wright convincingly argues that what we believe about life after death directly affects what we believe about life before death. For if God intends to renew the whole creation—and if this has already begun in Jesus' resurrection—the church cannot stop at "saving souls" but must anticipate the eventual renewal by working for God's kingdom in the wider world, bringing healing and hope in the present life.

📖 **Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God**, by J. R. Daniel Kirk (Eerdmans, 2008). Kirk describes resurrection as central to the theology of Paul and to the pivotal book of Romans.

📖 **Missions in the Third Millennium: 21 Key Trends in the 21st Century**, by Stan Guthrie (Paternoster, 2nd edition 2005). Facts and analysis to help you become a faithful, informed, and effective advocate for God's global mission.

📺 Go to [www.leestrobels.com/videoserver/video.php?clip=strobelt1141](http://www.leestrobels.com/videoserver/video.php?clip=strobelt1141) for the online video, "Why Does the Resurrection Make a Difference?" The video features a discussion between Lee Strobel and Jerry Johnston.



## A Resurrection That Matters

*If we are completely saved from our sins through the Cross, what's the point of the empty tomb?*

By J. R. Daniel Kirk

In the spring of my senior year in college, I was deeply immersed in the rhythms of Christian life. I was a leader in InterVarsity, participated regularly in a Bible study with other seminary-bound friends, set my Sundays aside for worship and rest, and read more than my fair share of extracurricular Christian books. As Easter approached, I began rehearsing the importance of Jesus' resurrection. I knew that for Paul and the other New Testament writers, there could be no Christianity without it. Yet one day as I was walking back to my dorm, it dawned on me that the gospel as I understood it had no need for Jesus to be raised from the dead.

The story of salvation as I had learned it was, in its entirety, about the Cross. I would teach other students about the Romans Road to salvation and the Romans 6:23 bridge diagram. What each of these captured beautifully was that we had a sin problem that God overcame with the cross of Christ. But each presentation also omitted the Resurrection entirely. And why not? Once our debt has been paid, what else could we possibly need? What is so important about Easter?

### Jesus Holds Human Destiny

The most important thing to say is somewhat shocking at first blush. At his resurrection, Jesus becomes something that he was not before. Jesus becomes the enthroned king of the world—the Messiah. But isn't the Jesus we meet on the pages of the Gospels also the Messiah? Yes and no.

Jesus in the Gospels is like David in the Book of 1 Samuel. He has received God's anointing as the chosen king, but another king is currently on the throne. The story of the Gospels is one in which Jesus inaugurates a new reign of God and deals a deathblow to the imposter king through his death on the cross. If the Cross is the defeat of the old king, the Resurrection is the enthronement of the new. Jesus now literally sits in the space that the kings of Israel had figuratively occupied before him: at the right hand of God. Though the preexistent Christ has always been God's agent in the creation and rule of the world, the human Jesus is now joined to that role as Lord and king over all.

This is the logic behind Jesus' claim in the Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Matt. 28:18-20). At the Resurrection, Jesus has become the Messiah, the Christ, God's anointed ruler of the earth.

To be God's anointed, the Christ, is to be at least in part the human descendant of David. And so we find Peter, in the first sermon preached after Jesus' resurrection, insisting on three things: (1) During his life on earth, Jesus was a man to whom God testified through wonders and miracles; (2) King David prophesied that the Messiah would be enthroned when God raised him from the dead; and (3) God has, in fact, *made* Jesus both Lord and Messiah by raising him and thereby enthroning him.

The fact that Jesus' resurrection guarantees our future resurrection means that our present lives already bear signs of the future.

Having vanquished the Enemy, who had usurped authority over all the kingdoms of the world (Luke 4:5-8), Jesus reclaims for humanity its original purpose: to rule the world on God's behalf (Gen. 1:26-28). This is one reason why we find Paul referring to the resurrected Jesus as the second and last Adam. But as the last Adam, Jesus also holds humanity's destiny in his hands.



## Intruding on the Present

When we speak of human destiny, we are of course speaking of the future. The New Testament is clear that God has a future for this world, and that the transformation of humans is a crucial component of what lies in store. What are the implications of Jesus being our forerunner in resurrection life? The New Testament leads us to understand that the hopes and expectations of God's people are now hidden in Christ. In other words, the only way to take hold of God's promises for the future is to take hold of the resurrected Jesus in the present.

So, for example, God has promised future embodied life on a new earth. The only way to take hold of this promise is to be joined to the resurrected Lord. Christian hope is more than wishful thinking, because the future on which we have set our hearts has already begun with Jesus' resurrection. He is now what we shall be.

But our present life is also determined by Jesus' resurrection. When we claim that we are even now God's children, that God is growing us up into obedience, and that we are already justified, what we are saying in part is that the future laid up for us in the resurrected Christ is intruding on the present.

Why is it that we Christians can confidently affirm our identity as God's children, members of his family? The short answer is that we have received the Spirit of sonship (Rom. 8:15). But if we continue to probe, we discover that this Spirit is none other than the Spirit who sets Jesus apart as God's Son by raising him from the dead. Jesus' resurrection by the Spirit begins the re-creation of God's family. When we receive the Spirit of sonship, we are receiving the Spirit of Jesus, the resurrected Son of God.

The idea that we are God's children draws us back to Genesis 1. When God creates humans to rule, he creates them to reign in his stead as his beloved children. This is the significance of the language of "image and likeness." So when Jesus reclaims the mantle of lordship over the world, he simultaneously reopens the door into God's family. As we are renewed after the image of the resurrected Son, we are drawn into God's family as God's children and Jesus' sisters and brothers (Rom. 8:29).

As God's children, we are also called to be imitators of our heavenly Father. One of the richest explanations of resurrection that we find in Scripture is the promise that our future resurrection life bears fruit in the present. Jesus' resurrection leads Paul to use turns of phrase such as "walk in newness of life," and "present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead." In the mystery of God's economy, the fact that Jesus' resurrection guarantees our future resurrection means that our present lives already bear signs of the future. God renews us in obedience and sanctification now, but both are foretastes of the life we will know only when we are raised from the dead. That future has begun in the obedience that the Spirit of the resurrected Christ works in us today.

## Justification and the Empty Tomb

Somewhat closer to the heart of the gospel, justification is also a function of Jesus' resurrection. In order to get at this, we need to hold two things together. First, justification is a way of talking about our standing before God's judgment seat. Those who have been justified are those who have been vindicated or acquitted in the judgment. Then we need to see that resurrection was often understood as a gift God would give to those whom he justified. Resurrection is God's reward to the faithful, particularly those who had been faithful to the point of death.

In such a scenario, Jesus' resurrection functions as his justification in the courtroom of God. Jesus was mocked as a would-be king and sentenced to death for claiming to be the man at God's right

hand. God vindicates Jesus' claims, judging him to be faithful and true, by enthroning him at his right hand. Thus, as 1 Timothy 3:16 puts it, Jesus was "vindicated by the Spirit."

So when we proclaim that by faith in Christ we have been justified, we are saying two things about ourselves: (1) God's future word of judgment has been pronounced in the present; and (2) this judgment is a foretaste of our resurrection that we receive now because we participate in Jesus' resurrection.

These are a few examples that could be multiplied several times over. When we speak of Jesus' resurrection, we are not talking only about Jesus' present but also about our future and the ways that our future is breaking into the world in which we now live. In between Jesus' present and our future are the lives that play out the drama we will perform with full truth and beauty only when our bodies are raised from death.

## Creation with a Future

At a couple of points, we have turned to the creation stories in order to make sense of Jesus' resurrection. This is not a coincidence. Resurrection and new creation are inseparable. The future for which we long and hope is the moment when God recreates this world and populates it with renewed, embodied people. Resurrection tells us that a new creation is coming. The resurrection of Jesus tells us that this new creation has already begun.

We most clearly see the connection between Jesus' resurrection and the coming new creation in Romans 8. There Paul depicts the created order as an active participant in the drama that moves from suffering to resurrection life. Creation groans, says Paul. But these are not the pangs of death, but rather the pangs of new life. Creation groans as it awaits a new birth and the resurrection of God's children.

The idea of groaning connects creation to God's people and the Spirit. Paul says that we ourselves groan while we await our adoption as God's children, which is our resurrection. He then goes on to say that the Spirit groans in prayer. These prayers are uttered in accordance with God's desire that we be conformed to the image of his resurrected Son.

Creation's part in the symphony of groaning tells us that the created order has a future in the coming resurrection. But if this creation is groaning for redemption as we ourselves are, then we discover, to the surprise of many, that the fate of this world is not destruction but redemption.

The implications of this are vast. For one, if creation is to be redeemed, then we are not free to view any of our work in this world as just a lot of brass polishing on the *Titanic*. Because Jesus is the last Adam, he and those who are his siblings assume the vocation of the first Adam to rule, subdue, and fill the entire created order. The resurrection of Jesus tells us that God has given up on neither humanity nor the creation we were created to rule on God's behalf. In the mysterious economy of God, what we do here on earth is of eternal consequence.

This plea to work in the present as though it mattered for the future is nothing less than the call to take hold of creation's destiny and bring it to bear on the present. What is true of us is also true of the wider order: the future is already dawning.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul places followers of Jesus within a new creation that has already begun: "... the old has gone, the new has come!" This is the reality brought about by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The old powers have been defeated, the old self has been crucified, and the futility of creation is being undone. A new king is lord, the new self has been raised, and the creation is catching a glimpse of an eternity with hope.

## Sent People

There is one more way in which the resurrection of Jesus transforms our understanding of what God has called us to. The resurrected Jesus is the one who has the authority to send us out to the ends of the earth with the assurance that we will not labor in vain.

Matthew is representative of the other Gospels. Only after being raised from the dead can Jesus say, “All authority has been given to me; *therefore*, go!” From his first appearance to Mary in the garden to his last appearance to Paul on the road to Damascus, when the resurrected Jesus appears, he almost always sends. The vocation and mission of the church as a sent people depends on the resurrected Jesus as our sender.

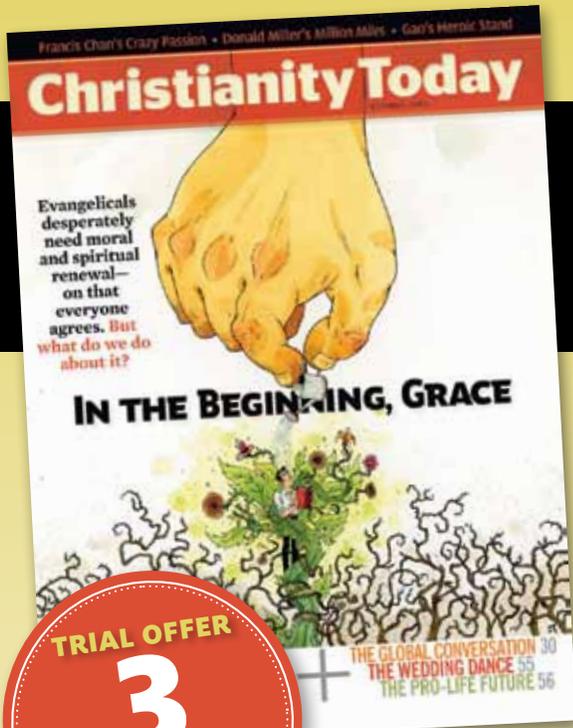
Together with what we have already seen above, resurrection transforms and empowers Christian mission because (1) the Lord of all the earth is the one who sends us; (2) we are scripted into this Lord’s resurrection story such that our own lives and futures are mirrors of his; and (3) the breadth of this mission must encompass the entirety of the created order. This is the Good News: not only a story of forgiveness but also a story of power, of transformation, and of hope.

In Flannery O’Connor’s short story “A Good Man Is Hard to Find,” the Misfit explains the world-shattering significance of Jesus’ resurrection: “He thrown everything off balance. If he did what he said then it’s nothing for you to do but throw away everything and follow him, and if he didn’t, then it’s nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can.”

With these words O’Connor declared, in concert with the New Testament writers, that the Resurrection is everything. Its truth or falsity determines whether the world has been irrevocably shaken by Easter Sunday or whether, instead, God has left Jesus, us, and the entire created order unanswered in our cries for salvation. No less than this is at stake in our affirmation that Jesus is raised from the dead.

—J. R. Daniel Kirk is associate professor of New Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary and author of *Unlocking Romans: Resurrection and the Justification of God* (Eerdmans).

“A Resurrection That Matters,” by J. R. Daniel Kirk, *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*, April 2010



TRIAL OFFER  
**3**  
Issues  
Free!



## WHY YOU NEED Christianity Today MORE THAN EVER

*Christianity Today* remains your indispensable companion as you intelligently engage and influence our world for Christ. With the addition of great new features and a bold, new design, *Christianity Today* is better than ever. Here's some of what you'll find in the new CT:

### **THE VILLAGE GREEN**

Three thought leaders discuss a crucial topic.

### **BRIEFING**

National and world news you need to know.

### **WHO'S NEXT**

Meet the people who shape the evangelical movement.

### **GROUNDBREAKING COLUMNS, ARTICLES, REVIEWS, & INTERVIEWS**

featuring Carolyn Arends, N.T. Wright, John Piper, Dinesh D'Souza, Tim Keller, and many more!

Hear from the men and women  
who are changing our world and

**join the conversation.**

**TRY 3 ISSUES FREE!**

[www.TryCT.com](http://www.TryCT.com)