

Way to Life

Vitus L.H. Chak

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Way to Life

by Vitus L.H. Chak

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**Heaven is the eternal home
of people who love God**

The apostle John had a vision of heaven. He says in the book of Revelation, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” (21:3).

According to John, heaven is God’s home. The fullness of his presence is there. On earth, when we pray and connect with God, we have a heightened awareness of his presence and a taste of heaven. We don’t just

share home with God, says John. We are related to him as his people, and he will be our God.

“God is love” (1 John 4:16). He loves us before our relationship with him is restored. Paul says, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us ... when we were God’s enemies” (Romans 5:8, 10).

Regarding our part in the restored relationship of love, Jesus said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). A psalmist expressed such a desire for God as he wrote, “Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere” (Psalm 84:10). Our love for God is “like a fire, the heat of which will be felt in everything we say and do” (RG, 150).

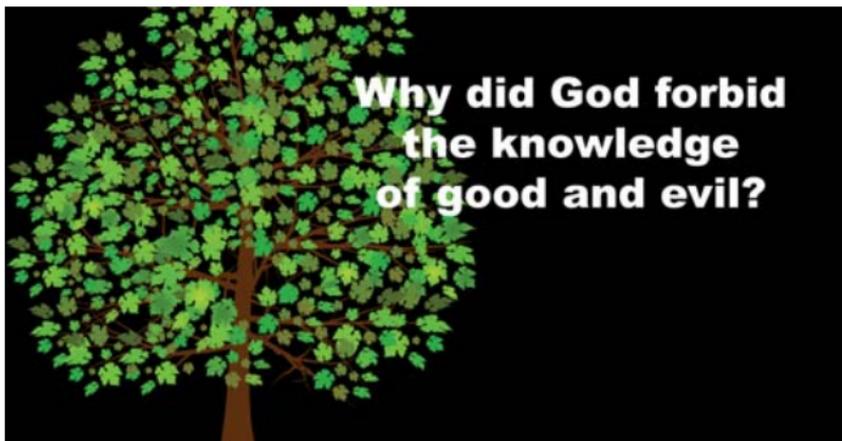
Hell is a dreadful place because it is the eternal separation from God, the source of love. It implies that hell is at best a place of total indifference and therefore absolute loneliness, or at worst a place of ultimate hatred and therefore endless torture.

The people in heaven also fear hell, but they are there not because of such fear. They are there because they love and desire God, and they are reconciled to him through the death of his Son, Jesus Christ (See Romans 5:10).

Notes:

- RG: Vitus Chak, *Restored by Grace* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/heaven.htm>

From Darkness to Light



Chapter two of the book of Genesis tells us that God the Creator placed the first human couple he created in the huge Garden of Eden, which had all kinds of trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the garden was also the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He warned them, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you

eat from it you will certainly die” (Genesis 2:16-17).

By giving a tree a particular name with a prohibition, God effectively gave the couple a choice. Their free will, which is the core nature of their being, then became a real ability they could exercise.

A verse in the Bible talks about innocent little ones as “children who do not yet know good from bad” (Deuteronomy 1:39). But moral discernment was surely not what God forbade. The knowledge referred to something else.

“God’s benevolent creation intention, as expressed in the norms he ordains, is what defines good. Evil is any deviation from his purpose. His will is the moral code for the entire creation because he’s the Creator and owner of everything. So God knows good

and evil because he prescribes the rules.”
(RG, 112)

The first couple were perfect humans, the smartest of us all. They knew their choice, decided to reject their limitations, and desired God’s knowledge of good and evil. They “tore themselves away from God and from their place in the creation order, and carved out their own realm of separate existence where they could be like God with the power to dictate the rules as they please. They became the center of their own world.”
(RG, 113-4)

The death God warned them of was the inevitable consequence of separation from him, rather than a punishment. It’s like a warning of being burnt if one touches a fire with a bare hand. Our benevolent Maker “has no need to be satisfied and yet provides everything we need. He alone knows our

best interests and has infinite resources for our eternal benefits. We're not equal. Unplugging ourselves from him is really as bad as death." (RG, 114)

The immediate consequence was that the first couple were two separate beings trying at the same time to be the center of this realm. Strife was inevitable. Their relationship of love, communion, and equality turned into a relationship of servitude and domination, with one trying to rule the other. This strife is seen today in all human relationships.

"We're in an age in which everyone is exposed to a constant flood of external intentions to direct our will, from outright coercion to subconscious suggestion. Our will may be under strong influences, but we still possess the power to exercise it ... It's something that God chooses to respect, and he

therefore holds us responsible for our decisions.” (RG, vii)

Notes:

- RG: Vitus Chak, Restored by Grace (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/good-and-evil.htm>

From Darkness to Light

A black and white photograph of two hands pressed together in prayer, with the fingers pointing upwards. The hands are centered in the frame. Overlaid on the image is the text "What does the human nature, as the image of God, reflect?" in a yellow, bold, sans-serif font. The word "reflect?" is also written in white, semi-transparent text on the left and right sides of the hands.

**What does the human nature,
as the image of God,
reflect?**

“God said, ‘Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us ...’ So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27)

The phrase “to be like us” strengthens the idea of resemblance as the primary meaning of the word “image.” So the text describes something unique in humans, which clearly differentiates them from all other creatures. They were a reflection of their

Creator. In other words, something about God may be known by studying the original human nature. (See RG, 107)

We need to see who God is before we can understand what human nature, as the image of God, reflects.

The attributes of God are his greatness, his rationality, and his love. "His greatness is infinite. He's omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. His rationality is seen in the structure and regularities in his creation, in his justice and faithfulness, and in his purposes and plans. We see and experience his love in his relationships. His love is expressed in his benevolence, kindness, and grace. John says, 'God is love.' Love is the center of God's character. It sets his purpose, drives his will, and defines his relationships." (RG, 109)

The first human beings were created as persons of free will who could feel and reason. They were conscious beings in very close relationships with each other and with God their Maker.

“They experienced freedom in their daily choices. They enjoyed harmony and fun with each other and with the other creatures. They felt love and intimacy in relationships. They felt fulfillment and growth in exercising their abilities and in discovering about the world as they learned to govern it.

“Their faculty of reason enabled them to communicate, observe, understand, and innovate ... As they lived, worked, and learned, it would soon be obvious to them that they had limitations ... They were finite beings who could never reflect the infinite greatness of God, which even the entire crea-

tion could only suggest. It was the character of God that they reflected.” (RG, 111)

But the first couple decided to reject their limitations. They “tore themselves away from God and from their place in the creation order, and carved out their own realm of separate existence where they could be like God with the power to dictate the rules as they please. They became the center of their own world” (RG, 113-4). They “dragged the entire human race into the long course of depravity, like a branch cut off from the vine. Their humanity was gradually warped, and their reflection of the character of God dimmed” (RG, 115).

Today, our life “is largely disconnected from God. It has fallen short of the Maker’s intention and is therefore broken. We can’t expect the life of this age to be void of evil and suffering and we can’t expect

always enough good things to balance our pain” (RG, 21). However, God “saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5).

Notes:

- Genesis 1:26 mentions God using the first person plural pronoun. Scholars have various views. Simply put, the conclusion is this: (1) Wherever the Bible uses the third person pronoun to mention God, it's always singular. With extremely few exceptions (like Genesis 1:26), when first person pronoun is used, it's also singular. So the Bible says unequivocally that there is only one God. (2) The plural pronoun in Genesis 1:26 can be seen as expressing the fullness of God while hinting at the triune nature of God. God wills to create (Genesis 1:1), “the Spirit of God was hovering...” (Genesis 1:1), and God's Word was the agent of His infinite creative power (Genesis 1:2).

From Darkness to Light

- RG: Vitus Chak, Restored by Grace (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/image-of-god.htm>



The apostle Paul says, “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23). Here he talks about a human condition that nobody is outside of. But how could he be so sure?

Paul wrote in Greek to the Romans. The Greek Old Testament widely used in his days was the Septuagint. There’s a verse in the Old Testament book of Judges that describes the incredible skill of some Benjamin soldiers. It says, “Among Benjamin’s elite

troops, 700 were left-handed, and each of them could sling a rock and hit a target within a hairsbreadth without missing” (Judges 20:16).

The word “sinned” in Paul’s letter and the word “missing” in the book of Judges have the same stem in Greek. So Paul is saying that we sin when we miss the target. Any deviation from the standard is sin. What then is the target? The second part of Paul’s sentence tells us it’s God’s glorious standard, which can only mean his creation intention or the image of God in the original human nature. So sin is not reflecting God as he intended in our nature. It means more than law breaking. Even thinking or saying bad things is below the target. That makes us all sinners. No wonder Paul says everyone has sinned. (See RG, 132-3)

What brings God's judgment on us are our sinful thoughts, words, and deeds. "The person who sins is the one who will die ... wicked people will be punished for their own wickedness" (Ezekiel 18:20). We sinned against our Maker because we took from him what's rightfully his, which is a creature he originally intended. Our relationship with our Maker is the ground of the entirety of life. So when we sin, it always means that we sin against God. (See RG, 133)

How we see things often makes a huge difference. Sin is not a transgression against an arbitrary set of laws God imposed on us. When one acknowledges a sin in his life, he's not comparing himself with others and seeing himself as the worst. We should have a strong abhorrence of sin, but this revulsion is not directed at any person—yourself or others.

“We look at sin from the vantage point of the justice of God. Any sin before his holiness is an intolerable burden that condemns us to the most severe penalty. We should be horrified by our sins and terrified by the wrath of God. As much as we know the intensity of this fear, we truly know the greatness of his forgiveness and love.” (RG, 144)

Surely, we are condemned by the sins we willfully commit. But the biggest problem is the refusal to respond to the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “The world’s sin is that it refuses to believe in me” (John 16:9).

Notes:

- RG: Vitus Chak, *Restored by Grace* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/all-have-sinned.htm>



The crucifixion of Jesus revealed what ancient events concealed.

“Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other ... I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come.”
(Isaiah 46:9-10)

Over 3500 years ago, the entire household of Jacob, who was renamed Israel by God, migrated from the land of Israel today to Egypt. They flourished there and in a few

hundred years grew to be a great people. A new ruler felt threatened and began oppressing them, forcing them to be slaves. They cried out to the God of their forefathers for deliverance, and God heard them. He chose Moses to lead them out of Egypt, back to the land he promised to give to their ancestors.

The deliverance was fourfold. God said, "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God ... I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord." (Exodus 6:6-8)

On the night of the Exodus, God brought the judgment of death upon the land

of Egypt for their sins. To save themselves, the Israelites were instructed to sacrifice a young lamb without defect, and put some of its blood on the top as well as the two sides of the doorframe. When the destroyer from God saw the blood, he would pass over the house, and the firstborns inside were covered and delivered from death. The Passover was then instituted as a yearly feast to remember the events.

About 1500 years later, in Jesus's day, the Seder or ceremonial order included drinking four cups of wine to remind them of God's fourfold deliverance.

The night before the Passover, Jesus had his last supper with his disciples. He made it a Passover Seder. At the start of the meal, he drank the first cup with the disciples. It was the cup of sanctification, to remember God's bringing them out to be his people. Then

Jesus skipped the cup of judgment, which he intended to take it all by himself. He prayed in anguish later in the garden of Gethsemane about this second cup, and said, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Jesus also skipped the fourth cup, but took the third, the cup of redemption, with his disciples. He made it the cup of the new covenant.

Jesus was arrested in Gethsemane that night and crucified at nine the next morning. His cross was in the middle, with two others, one on each side of him. The Passover lambs were to be slain from three to six that afternoon, and when the last one is done, the priest would announce, "It is finished."

Before Jesus breathed his last at three in the afternoon, he said, "It is finished," before the first lamb was slain in the Temple. He

was the Passover Lamb to be sacrificed once and for all, to deliver all who believe in him from the judgment of death.

Notes:

- (1) Cup of Sanctification: After taking the cup, Jesus gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you” (Luke 22:17).
- (2) Cup of Judgment: Jesus prayed, “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done” (Luke 22:42). When Jesus was arrested, he commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?” (John 18:11).
- (3) Cup of Redemption: After the supper Jesus took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20).
- (4) Cup of Praise: It reminds the Jews of God leading them into the promised land. Jesus said, “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes” (Luke 22:18).

From Darkness to Light

- Vitus Chak, *Restored by Grace* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/lamb-of-god.htm>

The Prayer That Changes Everything



The problem of sin is real. There is darkness in our lives and in the world. But we can't solve this by self-efforts. We can't escape the consequences of sin, break its grip, reconcile ourselves to our Maker against whom we've sinned, and restore the original image of God in our nature.

God alone provides the solution through Jesus Christ. "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him

will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). And to all who believe and accept him, God gives them the right to become his children (John 1:12). Paul stresses that God saves us by his grace when we believe, and we “can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Jesus said, “No one can come to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). He is the only way to return to God. All who come through Christ to God, with a penitent heart, will have their sins forgiven (1 John 1:9). Paul says that God makes us alive with Christ, for he forgives all our sins. He cancels the record of the charges against us and takes it away by nailing it to the cross (Colossians 2:13-14).

Forgiving without forgetting is incomplete. The Bible says that God will remove

our sins as far from us as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). God himself promised, “Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

Through Christ, we don't just receive complete forgiveness, but also a brand new start. Paul says, “The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you” (Romans 8:11). Because the Holy Spirit dwells in us, we have the power to break free from the bondage of sin. God washes away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:4-5). “This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a

new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

How then do we receive forgiveness from God, have our relationship with him restored, and accept the Holy Spirit into our lives to free us from the power of sin?

The best news is that God has done all the heavy lifting, and he is waiting for us to repent and believe in Christ. We express this desire and decision before God, which means in the form of a prayer, like what the criminal crucified with Jesus did (See Luke 23:40-43).

The decision has two parts. First is to accept that Christ died your death to bear the penalty of your sins so that you can be forgiven and accepted by God. By his resurrection, you can be with him eternally after death. The second is to invite God back into the center of your life, to be your Lord, to

transform and restore you to be the person he originally intended.

If you do want to return to God, you need to come before him in the right attitude. Jesus made it very clear in a sermon recorded by Matthew (See RG, 136-8). You need to realize that

- you are in a dire spiritual condition that you are powerless to change,
- you are deeply sorry for not living as God created you to and so sinning against him,
- there is God's solution of grace you can trust in and submit to, and
- you crave intensely to be right with him, to be forgiven and restored.

If these truly and accurately reflect the condition of your heart, please carefully read

out before God the decision prayer below. He listens to everyone who seeks and calls upon him.

Dear God, I, [your name here], have sinned against you by not living my life as you intended. I feel deeply sorry about this, and I want to repent of my sins. I accept Jesus as my personal Savior, to die for my sins on the cross so that I can be forgiven and be right with you. Please come into the center of my life, to be my Lord and transform me. I will seek to know you, obey you, and follow you for all my life. In the name of my Lord Jesus Christ I pray. Amen.

If you have prayed this prayer, you are now a child of God. Your heavenly Father knows you personally and loves you dearly. He cares about everything in your life and is eager to listen to your every prayer. He will

welcome you to the heavenly home with him at the end of your blessed life on earth.

Notes:

- RG: Vitus Chak, Restored by Grace (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/decision-prayer.htm>

From Darkness to Light



The spiritual new birth comes immediately after the decision prayer, but the renewal takes time.

“The fact that this takes a long time is not due to any limitation in God’s power; rather, it’s because of his respect of the slow pace of change in our will. We progress as fast as we learn to know and submit to him, and as far as we yield to him the control of our lives.” (RG, 144)

Jesus mentioned eight qualities of those who belong to the kingdom of heaven. One of them is the “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matthew 5:6). A true disciple is therefore one who intensely craves for a godly life. Such a life is an image of God that reflects his character. Jesus promised that these people “will be filled,” stressing that they cannot satisfy themselves. It’s a work of God. We crave, and God satisfies. It takes a supernatural regeneration to live a godly life.

Paul reveals the secret of how this is done. We crave for godly living and yield the full control of our lives to the Holy Spirit. He describes this as seeking to “be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

The universal sign of spiritual renewal is that the person bears the visible fruit of the Spirit, which comprises “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Jesus said, “A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad” (Matthew 12:33). He reminded his disciples, “Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5).

The fruit of the Spirit is not induced or affected by circumstances. The nine qualities seem to overflow from an unknown inexhaustible inner source. The person being regenerated feels them, and the world sees them.

What the world sees are children of God completely soaked in *love, joy, and peace* regardless of circumstances. They are *patient* to wait upon God for vindication and provision. Their focus is on expressing *kindness* towards people, and *goodness* in moral principles. They are *faithful* to their promises, and to insist on truths that benefit others. Their *gentleness* is demonstrated in their sensitivity to others' needs and feelings. They also exercise appropriate *self-control* in their decisions and interpersonal interactions. (See RG, 150-1)

Notes:

- RG: Vitus Chak, Restored by Grace (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/spirit-fruit.htm>



Communion with God

All born-again Christians are already saved by the blood of Christ, but to grow in Christ, we need to remain connected to him.

Our daily communion with God is crucial to our spiritual health. In our time with God, we listen to his Word and connect with him in prayer. Between such times, we maintain the constant awareness of this connection so that we “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

A person who loves and desires God naturally loves his Word. The Word of God, or the Bible, is our supreme source of truth. It corrects our worldview, reorders our priorities, and helps us discern what God sees right. Psalm 119 says, “Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path” (Psalm 119:105).

Besides reading the Bible, we should commit parts of it to memory. The same psalm says, “I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). Memorize the verses that tell you who God is, and that describe his nature and attributes. Important too are his promises and commands, and the verses that speak personally to you. Memorizing scripture makes it always accessible, and allows the Holy Spirit to speak to you through his Word at any time.

While it's important to read through the entire Bible, it's best to begin with the New Testament, especially the four Gospels. It's also helpful to keep two separate readings of the Bible in parallel, one fast, one slow. Read fast for general understanding to get the big picture, and slowly to immerse yourself in the event described or the context behind the text, for a deeper understanding or devotion purpose.

The devotional reading of the Bible is more experiential and relational. Reflection is particularly necessary. The reading should guide you to focus on God. Think about his nature, his greatness, and his goodness as you reflect upon what he did in your life and the lives of the people, if any, mentioned in the text. Listen with your heart for new understanding or insights that may bring light to your relationships, to understanding

the will of God for your life, and to the tasks you're tackling.

Prayer is always about God. It's about his glory, his lordship, and his purpose (See Matthew 6:9-10). It's a purpose of our heavenly Father for us to keep trusting him, and to live victoriously (See Matthew 6:11-13). Prayer is not our judging what's best and then asking God for immediate gratification. He won't do things contrary to his nature, his promises, and his commands.

When we pray, we anticipate that God listens. We don't pray to inform him of our needs because he knows them before we pray (See Matthew 6:8). We pray to become aware of our real needs, and to know and submit to his will. "The omniscient God surely knows our true needs. But this should not in any way dampen our motivation to pray because we pray not to change him

but to change ourselves, to build our faith in him. We pray till our faith grows beyond believing and trusting, to willful submission to his purpose. This faith sees our part in his intervention plan and gives us the courage to act accordingly.” (RG, 155)

Though our anticipation continues after prayer to see how God responds, our focus should be on knowing his will as we pray. The answer is just the playing out of his will. If our faith sees the confirmation of his will over and over again, all but short of a clear response, it only means that we need to keep praying. Our heavenly Father never ignores the needs of his children. When we see no response to our prayer, it means that our expectation of the timing and playing out of his response doesn't yet align with his purpose and plan. (See RG, 156)

Notes:

- RG: Vitus Chak, Restored by Grace (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/time-with-god.htm>



“Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

The global community of Christians is the Church, and “Christ is ... the head of the Church, which is his body” (Colossians 1:18). We are closely interconnected as parts of this body. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If

one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad." (1 Corinthians 12:25-26)

The Spirit of God resides not only in the life of each believer, but also collectively in the church. "Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16) The Holy Spirit imparts life to the church so that it can bear the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), and that it becomes one in heart and mind (Acts 4:32).

It all means that the Christian life can be fully realized only in fellowship with one another. In the community of true disciples, we are doing life together. So it's important that you are connected with a community of Christians.

One of the most important purposes for

Christians to meet together is corporate worship.

“What matters most in worship is being the right person. God is the entire reason for worship, and we must approach him with the right heart and mind.” (RG, 158)

The worship service occupies a *set time* that continues from your past to your future. Spiritually it's a break in your linear timeline during which time you enter into God's presence. It's an *opportune moment* of your engaging with God. It's a moment when your present breaks with the circumstances of your past up to that point, and breaks with everything that will again burden your mind and heart right after. It's a moment of holy encounter. It's a *timeless moment* in God's presence that's a foretaste of eternity when time is no more. (See RG, 158-9)

“So when we come to worship, the focus is always on the attributes of God instead of our own unfinished business or future concerns. When we focus on who God is, it’s important that we don’t create our own god by emphasizing some of his attributes and ignoring others. The most common distortion is to adore his grace and love and, at the same time, regard little his holiness and abhorrence of sin ...

“When in worship, we must be aware that God is here and now. Our past is in our thanksgiving, and our future is in our faith and hope. In the present, ‘here’ is the divine space, and ‘now’ is the divine time, and we’re in the presence of God. We worship by faith, trusting that we’re entering into his presence and we’ll meet him there.” (RG, 159)

Notes:

- RG: Vitus Chak, *Restored by Grace* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/life-together.htm>

The Messiah's Return



The picture shows the Old City of Jerusalem today with the Mount of Olives in the distance. The tallest steeple on the Mount belongs to the Russian Orthodox Church near the Chapel of the Ascension.

Luke tells us that, after his resurrection, Jesus showed himself to the apostles for forty days. He was then taken up before their very eyes, on a hill called the Mount of Olives, which is about one kilometer from Jerusalem on the east. (See Acts 1:3, 9-12)

While the apostles were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, two angels appeared and said to them, “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!” (Acts 1:11).

Angels never spoke in riddles to the people they were sent to. Their instructions were always plain and direct. Likewise, in this case, the description of Jesus’s second coming is simple and visual. It will be the physically visible, bodily return of the same Jesus, from heaven back down to the Mount of Olives. Zechariah prophesied, about five hundred years before the birth of Jesus, “On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem” (Zechariah 14:4).

So if someone tells you that Jesus has returned in spirit form or the form of another person, somewhere other than the Mount of Olives, that is a blatant lie. Or, if someone tells you a specific date or time of Jesus's return, that is also a lie because Jesus himself said, "no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen, not even the angels in heaven or the Son himself. Only the Father knows." (Matthew 24:36)

But Jesus did tell the disciples the signs pointing to the imminence of his return. He said about those signs, "when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door." (Matthew 24:33). He stressed again later, "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour." (Matthew 25:13)

The expectancy about the Messiah's return powerfully reminds us to live a godly

life and to keep a heavenly perspective on everything.

Jesus's return also means the end of the grace period for many because of the cataclysmic events preceding it. So we should pray and work hard to bring people to Christ. Each of us surely has a unique role to play in God's grand plan of spreading the good news of redemption, from being active instruments of direct evangelism to being agents who realize the goodness of God on earth. We should actively seek the will of God for our lives regarding this. (See RG, 152)

Notes:

- RG: Vitus Chak, *Restored by Grace* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/second-coming.htm>



Each person knows whether they truly meant every word in their decision prayer. They know if they felt sorry for not living their lives as God intended, repented of their sins, appropriated the atoning death of Christ, and asked for God's forgiveness. They know if they decided, for the rest of their lives, that they will love, know, obey, and follow God. They know if God is their Lord and top priority in life. Each can indeed have the assurance of his or her salvation.

They only need to search their hearts and know the promises of God.

King Solomon said that God alone knows the human heart (2 Chronicles 6:30). Others cannot judge with certainty. None can be sure if another is a born-again Christian, by considering his or her religious commitments or professed beliefs, even when that person is morally good or likable.

But we can have a good idea of a tree by looking at its fruit. Jesus said, "A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad" (Matthew 12:33). We must be careful here. No tree is perfect, and so we cannot expect perfect fruit. Also, Jesus did not suggest that we compare fruit across trees. We are to look at a person's life and see if there is a transformation that defies all natural explanation. If someone's love for God is like a

blazing fire, its light and heat are easily seen and felt. As the Holy Spirit renews a born-again Christian, the supernatural fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) are plainly observable.

One trait, however, stands out. God is love (1 John 4:16), and therefore the most distinguishing mark of a child of God is love. The entire law of God, which expresses his creation intention for humans, centers around love. Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength," and he continued with the second greatest commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30-31). The second one is widely accepted as the Golden Rule of Ethics.

The Golden Rule applies to all people within reach of your help, whether conven-

ient or not. Again, we need to exercise caution. We are to love people, not their wrongdoings. Love is not a reason to condone misbehavior that hurts.

The world has high expectations for Christian love, and rightly so because it's the nature of God, and therefore the nature of us as his images. So, "let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Hebrews 10:24).

"We need to separate the acts of love from the emotions of fondness and compassion, and Christian love is more in both aspects. We've experienced God's intense affection and compassion towards us in his tearing himself apart, so to speak, to offer us the redemption by grace alone ... Our own experience of his love motivates us and gives us a model to emulate. When God shows us a real need of someone we don't like, it's

time for us to learn submission and pray for strength to choose and do the good work of love. By so doing, he changes our hearts as well. Extensive and persistent acts of Christian love have a powerful effect on our society. Such acts build faith in the goodness of sanctified humanity and give hope to those who are oppressed or in pain.” (RG, 161-162)

God is the God of miracles. If by his grace some people are brought to the gospel truth, they will be our dear brothers and sisters in heaven. We have no enemies, but one. The Devil is hell-bent to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). He is our only enemy. There is no room for any hostility towards people, especially due to differences in background, appearance, or opinion. God doesn't want “anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Christians love others with love received from God. We receive and get all soaked up with his love, and release it. Receive and release. It is a constant process in the Christian life.

Notes:

- RG: Vitus Chak, *Restored by Grace* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/mark-of-christian.htm>



In a sermon to his disciples, Jesus taught that they are the salt of the earth and light of the world (Matthew 5:13-16). It was about their identity in the world, rather than virtues to develop, goals to achieve, or commands to obey. He ignored the look of the crystal grains or the make of the lamp. What really matters are the saltiness and the light. Without these attributes, said Jesus, the lamp or the crystal grains are useless.

Salt was used mainly for preservation to slow down decay and to bring out the good flavor of food. So it's the nature of the disciples to curb moral decay, as well as to bring out what's good in our society and people's lives. Being salt is, on the one hand, to oppose or slow down evil or something negative in our society, such as structured injustice or systemic oppression. Poverty in an affluent society is an example of structured injustice, and systemic oppression includes all forms of slavery. Our role as salt, on the other hand, is to make whole what's good in our society and facilitate the good works of good people.

There is no darkness in light. Jesus taught the disciples, "Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). The good deeds are to be

seen, not to bring glory to the doer, but to God who supernaturally regenerated the disciples to do such works. The extensive and persistent acts of Christian love build faith in the goodness of sanctified humanity and give hope to those who are oppressed or in pain. This is part of our role as the light of the world.

Jesus said on another occasion, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Paul says in a letter, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). So another part of our being light is to illuminate the world with truths and ultimately the good news of salvation. It’s necessary for Christians to let our society know, with due respect, the biblical perspective on fundamental issues. Most

important of all, we must bring the truth of redemption to the world in darkness.

Many people have their definition of “good,” and what’s said could be used to justify very different decisions and lines of actions. But the prophet Micah says that God “has shown you, O mortal, what is good” (Micah 6:8). He then gives it a meaning and suggests three practical actions. Good is what the Lord requires of you. To live it out, Micah says that we are to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God. That is, regarding systems and rules, we need to uphold justice; regarding people, grace and kindness are the guiding principles. The last one means reliance on God and submission to him.

What gives the disciples their social identity? The answer lies in the immediately preceding part of the sermon, where Jesus

taught about the identity of the people belonging to the kingdom of heaven. He underscored eight attributes (Matthew 5:3-12). The promises for the first and eighth blessed qualities are the same, bracketing them as a group. They are characteristics of the people of the kingdom of heaven, meaning true disciples. The first four are in one subgroup, the rest in another. This is indicated by the choice of words in the Greek text. The words identifying the first four attributes all begin with the same letter, and all suggest something lacking (RG, 137-138).

The first four attributes describe how the true disciples overcome sin in their lives. They realize that they are in a dire spiritual condition, which they are powerless to change. They are deeply sorry for not living as God created them to and so sinning against him. There is God's solution of grace

they can trust in and submit to. And they crave intensely to be right with God, to be forgiven and restored.

The other four attributes describe the outward expressions of their lives in Christ. True disciples are the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, and those persecuted because of righteousness.

The merciful see the miserable consequences of sin, feel pity, and desire to relieve the suffering they themselves were rescued from. They see what God sees, which is people needing the mercy of God because they are still in sin.

The hearts of true disciples are made pure or undivided by being emptied and then refilled (Galatians 2:20). These are hearts that desire God, seek to know him, love him, and serve him.

True disciples are inevitably very concerned about the state of estrangement between people in sin and their Creator. They selflessly endeavor to restore peace wherever they are, and ultimately desire all people to be right with God.

True disciples walk with God and so become more like Jesus and more different from the godless world. They will be hated without doing anything that calls for persecution, but because, as light, they naturally expose darkness. Whenever we receive unfriendly or even hostile treatment, however, we need to ask first if we've done our duties well, borne the visible fruit of the Spirit, adequately respected others' rights and freedom, especially in their choices and opinions, and whether there are misunderstandings. The persecution Jesus talked about is purely due to our faith in God.

The two identities are fundamentally related. The disciples are first the people of the heavenly kingdom, then the salt and light of the world.

Notes:

- RG: Vitus Chak, *Restored by Grace* (Bloomington: WestBow Press, 2017).
- <http://restoredbygrace.life/salt-and-light.htm>



Restored by Grace presents the evidence that builds a compelling case for the Christian faith. The book aims to cogently answer some key questions:

- Does affliction contradict the God of love?
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- Is there a reality beyond the physical?
- Can we trust the Gospels as reliable eyewitness accounts of first-century historical events?

- Is it rational to believe Jesus's divinity claims and his resurrection?
- What led to the human condition today?
- What is the meaning of the crucifixion of Jesus?
- How do we grow in our restored relationship with God?

As the author, Vitus Chak, says in the Preface, "Before the heart resonates and the will acts in response, the mind has to understand. I wrote the book to appeal to your reason ... The book talks about a reality that is there but not commonly realized. It takes reason to know it and faith to see it."

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