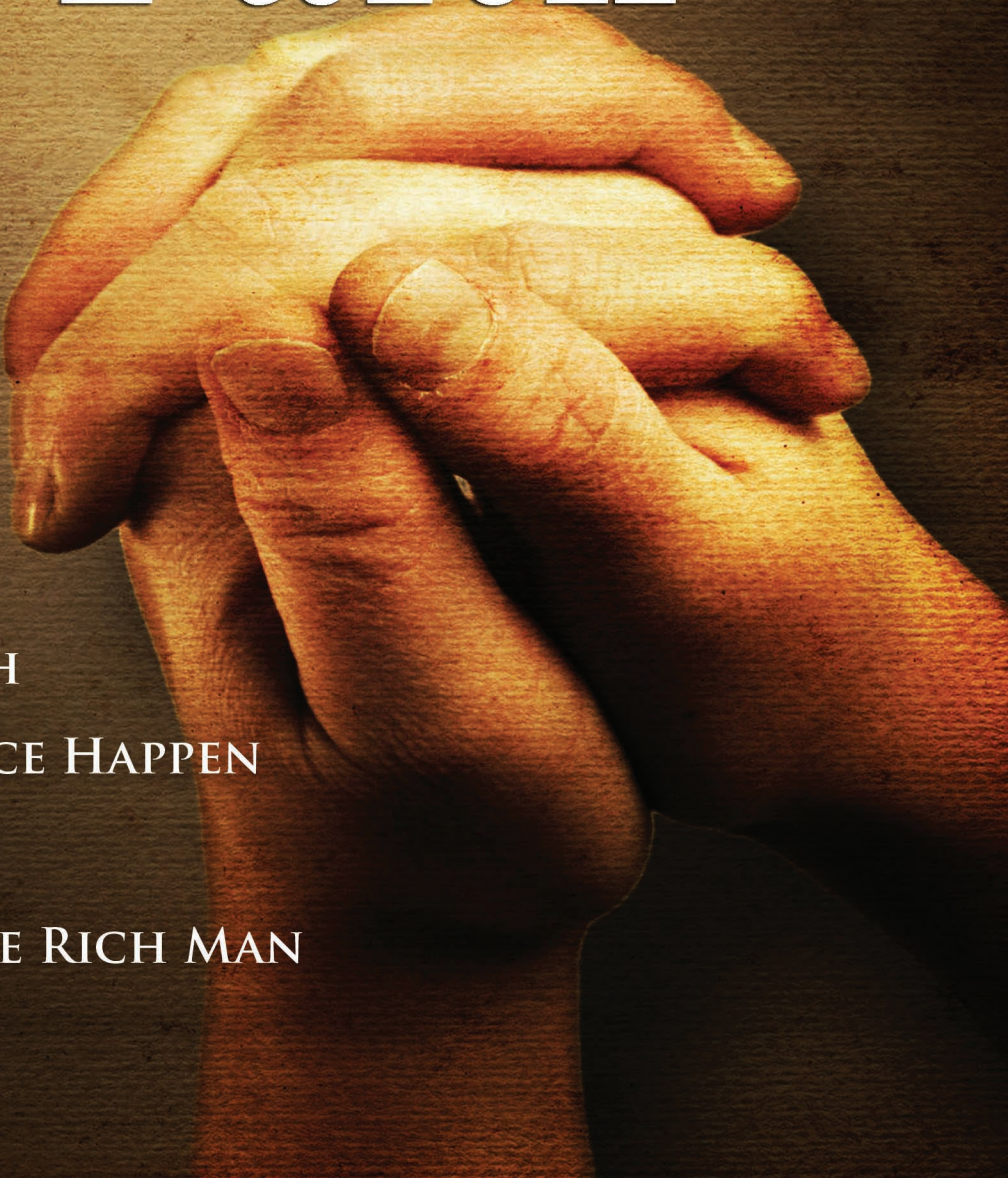


April - June 2012

ARMOR OF GOD

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

Grace & Faith

- 
- GRACE AND FAITH
 - WILL TRUE JUSTICE HAPPEN
 - TRUE FREEDOM
 - LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN

Do We Need More Laws ?

Man's quest for a peaceful co-existence with his fellowman is one reason why laws have to be created and implemented. In a republican system where freedom of worship is liberally allowed, religious persuasion is not given too much importance in regulating how people should deal with one another. One's obligations to the state and to his fellow citizen are defined through the laws conceived and formulated by the men and women who are voted into office for the purpose.

Now, man's nature is influenced by a combination of good and evil. (Gen. 3:22) He is not absolutely law abiding, nor does he lack certain degree of submissiveness. Several generations ago people possessed a higher sense of honesty and integrity. In her speech after her retirement from the Supreme Court, the current Ombudsman said: "Totally erasing the constitutional directive to "live modest lives," the situation now stands that it becomes socially acceptable or even perfectly normal for public servants to own 10 mansions and/or have 10 cars. Whereas before, one can chance upon a Health Secretary inside a provincial bus traveling to rural areas." This observation was not a result of numerous laws passed against dishonesty. That generation had fewer laws to observe than what we have at present.

Today, the present legislative body called the 15th congress is composed of 23 senators and 284 congressmen. They are responsible for drafting bills and passing laws which are sent to the President for final enactment. To date, the senate filed a total of 3,204 bills; the lower house probably even more considering their number.

Come May 2013, the country will hold another election. At stake are local and national officials, most of whom are aspiring for the job of lawmaking. How many bills do you suppose will these upcoming lawmakers have in their agenda? The quandary that an ordinary person on the street is faced with is why, with all these laws, and with more coming, the country's woes remain extant. Criminality and lawlessness, in all manner and classifications persist continually.

[Continued on page 15]

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GRACE AND FAITH

By Winston S. Co

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." Ephesians 2:8-9. Most of us have heard countless sermons and messages on the subject. This article hopes to clarify the Apostle Paul's incredible insight, intent and meaning of this particular all important passage in the scriptures.

Let us take a few minutes to ponder on a few questions. What did Paul mean by "...for by grace are you saved through faith."? Is there a difference between grace and faith? If there is, what is the difference? If any, what is the relationship between grace and faith? Is there a clear and defined distinction between grace and faith?

What is grace?

What is grace? To understand grace we must understand God. Peter said that God is gracious. (1 Peter 2:3; 5:10) That means God is kind, merciful and loving. It is God's wish that everyone come to repentance and attain salvation. (Acts 17:30; 1 Tim. 2:4)

How does the grace of God work? Grace as we know is unmerited and undeserved pardon. Pardon is leniency, clemency and forgiveness for an offense, a crime or a sin. Sin as defined by John is "the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4) Sin comes into existence when one of God's righteous command is violated. The penalty of breaking God's command is death. (Romans 6:23)

Grace operates only in an environment where law and sin exist. Paul in Romans 4:15 and Romans 7:8, clarified that "where there is no law, sin does not exist." Consequently, where there is no sin grace is not applicable. Paul further clarified that the grace of God does not abolish the law lest there be lawlessness. (Romans 7:7)

Workings of Grace

God's grace is not absolutely FREE. God's grace comes with a stiff price. That price was the life of His One and only Begotten Son. Christ died in our stead. He took our sin and He died for you and me. He redeemed us from the penalty of sin which is death. That is God's grace towards us.

Law and grace work on different planes. The wages of sin is death. But, the grace of God saves, Romans 6:23. How does grace work? God has provided another way to righteousness apart from the law. (Romans 3:21-26) Christ died for all sinners. He paid the death penalty in our stead. Now, we are set free from the penalty of sin which is death.

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The Benefit of Grace

Grace means freedom from the condemnation of death. (Romans 8:1-11) The benefit of grace is that we have been set free from the death penalty. We are again a free man because our sins are pardoned. And this time, we belong to God who rescued us from death. Being freed from the penalty of sin doesn't mean we are beyond the reach of the law. (The analogy of a pardoned convict exemplifies best; he is not suppose to break the law again, otherwise he will have to face another jail term if convicted.) It simply means the penalty had been paid for by Christ – subsequently, we are redeemed from death.

Story of Paul

To understand what Paul meant, we have to know where Paul is coming from. Paul talked extensively about God's grace in all his writings because his case is a perfect example of how grace works. From his personal viewpoint and experience, he tried to explain it to the gentiles to whom he preached.

Paul had a 180 degree change of persuasion. At one point in his life he was a persecutor of the church. But in a sudden turn of event, he became an ardent preacher of Christ - the Head of the church he once fiercely persecuted. Paul, at one point an enemy of God, deserves the worse punishment from God, yet God showed him mercy. God was gracious to him and called him to the ministry. Paul tried to share and explain this

administration and experience of grace to the people. Hence, he tirelessly wrote his experiences in all his epistles. Paul's personal experiences about his faith and God's grace is recorded in the following accounts: Acts chapter 9, 1 Corinthians 15:9; 1 Tim. 1:13, to name a few.

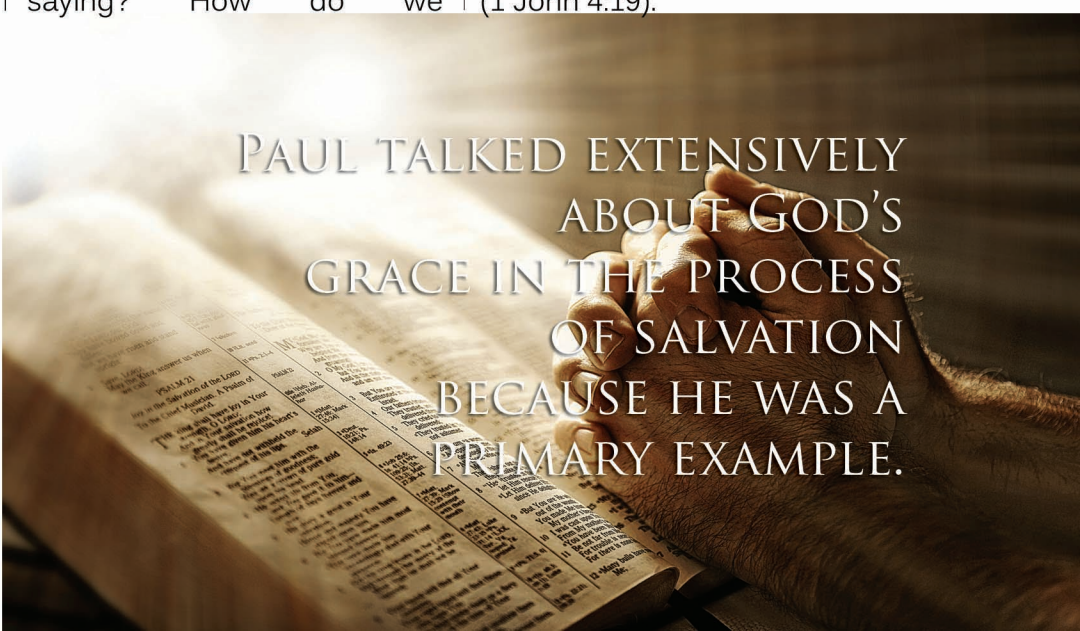
Paul at the beginning was faithless. He did not believe in Jesus Christ. He admitted he was the church zealous persecutor. (Acts 22:4) The language of his effort to persecute the church is found in Acts 9:1: "Meanwhile Saul (Paul) was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples." When he was shown mercy, he changed. He became one of the most dedicated and faithful preacher about Christ and His righteousness, and even set aside 'modesty' to claim he labored more than the rest. (1 Cor. 15:10)

Two Parts Process

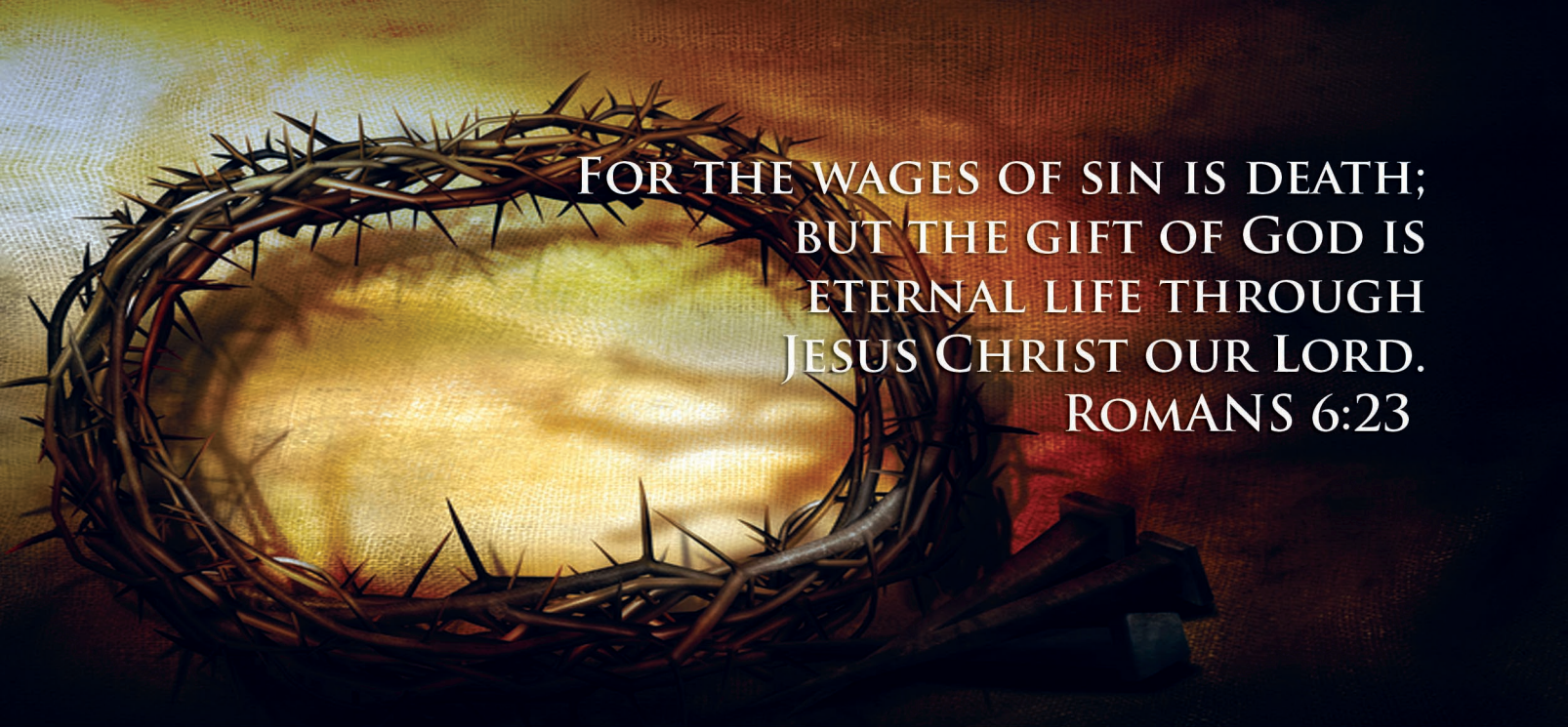
Let's now examine the passage in question. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, 'We are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus.' What is this verse saying? How do we

understand it? Unless someone inserts his private interpretation, there is really nothing in this verse that sounds puzzling. We just have to read the sentence carefully. The sentence comes in two parts. The first part says, '**saved by grace**'; and the second part says '**through faith in Christ Jesus.**'

The first part of the equation is grace. Grace is from God. Grace is purely God's prerogative. We cannot and do not, in anyway, form or shape, participate, convince, persuade, influence, or more so induce God at any time, or in any circumstance to be merciful to us. No one suggested to God the Father to send His One and only Begotten Son to redeem the world. It was purely of God's personal prerogative. Yes, nothing we have done requires God to be merciful and gracious unto us. God took it upon Himself to show grace, kindness, mercy and love towards us. Grace is a unilateral act of love from God. He first loved us before we can even love Him in return. (1 John 4:19).



PAUL TALKED EXTENSIVELY
ABOUT GOD'S
GRACE IN THE PROCESS
OF SALVATION
BECAUSE HE WAS A
PRIMARY EXAMPLE.



FOR THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH;
BUT THE GIFT OF GOD IS
ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH
JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.
ROMANS 6:23

In the case of Paul, what did he do for God to be gracious to him, to show him mercy and leniency? Nothing of Paul's murderous deeds deserve any mercy, yet God in His own prerogative showed mercy to Paul. That is what Paul was trying to communicate by saying that we are saved by grace and not by our works lest anyone should boast. Grace is God's private and personal prerogative.

How then do we access the grace of God? The answer is through faith in Jesus Christ. This is the second part of the sentence. We have to believe that God sent His Son to take your place in death. We have to acknowledge that He is our Savior. Then turn around, repent and start a new life in complete faith and obedience to God. True faith is manifested by living a life of unquestioned obedience to God. True faith is evidenced by good works; otherwise faith would be insincere and salvation would not have been possible. James said faith without works is dead, James 2:20.

Grace is an act of God. Grace is God's prerogative. Faith, on the other hand, is our response to God's grace in the salvation process. Grace is God's part of the salvation equation, while faith is our part of the equation. We are saved through our faith in Christ by living a life of obedience to God. God's grace can be accessed through our faith in Jesus Christ.

Which comes First then?

Is it our faith that activates grace, or God's grace that makes salvation though faith possible? Paul's statement is clear. We access God's grace through our faith in Christ! Grace makes salvation possible and attainable. Faith makes salvation accessible.

It is likened to God giving out bottled water to the thirsty, but you have to go to him to get the free bottled water. God had opened the door to salvation; that is by grace. We just have to walk through it; that is by faith. This is how Paul explained it in his Letter to the Ephesians in chapters 1 through 3.

We are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Grace is beyond the act of forgiveness and mercy. GRACE is bestowing upon us – mortals – the opportunity for immortality – to become a child in the Kingdom of God, to become an heir of God and co-heirs with Christ and to partake of His divine nature. Humanity lost this gracious privilege when Adam and Eve sinned against God. Yet, because of God's love and grace, He opened again the way to salvation. This time He sent His Son as a ransom for us all. Because of this grace, we now have access to salvation all over again.

Paul concluded: Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him we also have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice on the hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we glory in afflictions also, knowing that afflictions work out patience...." Romans 5:1-3.**AG**



WE KNOW THAT THE LAW IS GOOD,
IF A MAN USES IT LAWFULLY
1TIMOTHY 1:8

WILL TRUE JUSTICE HAPPEN?

By Eleno S. Mellomida

Some countries invoked the name of God in their constitution, yet this seemingly well – thought of and considered as a ‘hallowed’ document prescribes nothing about man’s relationship with his Maker. Apparently, humanly crafted laws only deal with governmental acts to regulate the activities of the nation and its citizens.

The question everyone has probably been asking is: Is man’s government capable of carrying out its commitment to “**render justice to every man**”? That is a non-changeable, an ever present line mouthed by every new president when sworn into office. Better and simpler yet, will true justice ever happen in the land today?

Justice System of the Land

A country’s justice system is the basic instrument in building a free and humane society. It is the

mechanism that supposedly guarantees the civil liberties of its people. The men and women who occupy this sensitive branch of government are presumed to possess not only ample knowledge and understanding of the law of the land, but also the virtues demanded of the position which is no less than probity, integrity and impartiality. Anyone holding this position is expected to be ‘blameless’ and beyond suspicion of any corruptibility and wrong doing.

Sadly, these standards are not fully complied with as we continually hear of the guiltless languishing in jail, victims robbed of their properties, or die without seeing the light of justice; while the real culprits unabashedly wallow in their loot, roam around freely, without qualms and with unperturbed consciences all because those who are tasked to dispense a just, equitable and fair

decision have considerations other than what they are tasked to implement.

The apostle Paul made a slightly paradoxical statement: ‘But we know that the law is good if a man uses it lawfully’, 1Timothy 1:8. Unlawfully using the law therefore is not a strange occurrence. Right now, while you are reading this piece, the ‘unlawful use of the law’ is likely happening within the confines of our judicial courts. All kinds of arguments, justifications and rationalizations will be presented utilizing one’s expertise of the law to weave ‘proofs’ in order to cover up a crime. Is there going to be a time when all these ‘legal remedies’ will be finally put to an end?

Speedy Justice - a Just Process

The God of the Bible is not remiss in providing guidelines on how an uncompromising and righteous dispensation of justice can be achieved so that man will

find harmony and temporary peace with his fellowman while waiting for God's government to usher in when Jesus returns.

Solomon wrote: Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil, Ecclesiastes 8:11.

The present justice system is tilted in favor of the moneyed and powerful offenders. It is a common practice among them to buy time and as much as possible employ strategies that will prolong the case. They know that a poor and tired complainant will soon grow weary and finally consider abandoning the case because of time and depleted resources. The long and cumbersome process to seek justice will finally take its toll, and the poor complainant will lose the case by default. Hence, the victory of the rich offender is assured because the judges and the lawyers may have inadvertently or deliberately dilly-dallied on the proceedings.

Swift justice also indirectly contributes to progress because contending parties can start moving on towards worthy endeavors rather than getting stuck up in things that will likely result in lost hours of productivity, expensive court hearings and endless divisiveness. Unknown to many, these burdensome processes will likely result in emotional stress, and may eventually breed a host of other illnesses. There has to be a closure for every evil deed, but not at the expense of compromising a speedy, just and non-partisan proceedings.

Certainty of Guilt Defined

The book of Deuteronomy has instruction on how to dispense true justice. Here is a simplified application of God's justice system. Notice: "If there is found

among you, inside any of your gates which Jehovah your God gives you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of Jehovah your God, in breaking His covenant, and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded, and **if it is told you, and you have heard and inquired carefully, and, behold, it is true and the thing is certain**, such abomination is done in Israel; then you shall bring forth that man or that woman who has committed that evil thing, to your gates, even that man or that woman, and shall stone them with stones until they die. **At the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses shall he that is worthy of death be put to death.** At the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. **The hands of the witnesses shall be first on him to put him to death**, and afterwards the hands of all the people. So you shall put the evil away from among you (Deut. 17:2-7).

The procedures outlined in these passages are considered foolproof formula to ensure that guilt is absolutely established with certainty so that the penalty can be carried out right away. To ensure that justice is served righteously, the process must be exhaustive and the fact-finding thorough. Notice the steps taken

to ferret out the truth: 1) **If it is told you and you have heard it**; and 2) **inquired carefully**; and 3) **behold it is true** and 4) **the thing is certain**; 5) **confirmed by the mouth of not less than two witnesses**.

Take note that full information has been gathered as to the guilt of the offenders to ensure that no error had been committed because life is so precious to be wasted due to false accusation and hearsays. The requirement to render a guilty verdict is founded on clear grounds, not on suspicious circumstances. If the weight of the evidences are overwhelming, then the penalty is implemented without delay.

One witness is not acceptable, but two or three witnesses are required to validate the offense. To ensure the person is not falsely accused, the witnesses shall have the 'privilege' of throwing the first stone. This is crucial because if the witnesses merely framed up the doomed person, they still have an opportunity to change their minds, recant their testimonies and stop the execution. They are well aware of the consequence of a false witness. Sooner or later, they will be found out to have conspired falsely and will likewise be meted with the same penalty incurred by the one whom they accused falsely. The prescription is found in Deuteronomy 19:18-20.

Note: "And behold, if the witness



is a false witness and has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he had thought to have done to his brother. So you shall put the evil away from among you. And those who remain shall hear and fear, and shall commit from then on no such evil among you."

The Justice System of Tomorrow

Justice without righteousness can never be just. Even prosperity, in the absence of a just system cannot be enjoyed to the full. Of course, prosperity cannot be achieved by everyone under an unjust system; a fact incessantly decried by those classified among the impoverished majority. In fact real and unbending justice is one aspect that will be given so much importance in the coming Kingdom of God.

Under God's system, the current practice aptly known as 'legal maneuverings' will be completely done away. No more exorbitant filing fees will be collected - a policy which poses as a major deterrent against victims of injustices who are seeking refuge from the courts. No more unreasonable acceptance and appearance fees, which to a degree encourage the pursuit of the law profession. Definitely, the law profession will be an extinct career in the kingdom of God. The kings and priests who will rule with Christ (Revelation. 20:4,6) will take charge of educating the people about God's laws - laws that are founded on love - expressed in the Ten Commandments.(1 John 5:3; Exodus 20:1-17)

The long and winding arguments and rebuttals in today's court of law to settle disputes will become a thing of the past. The clarity of God's law will put an end to all these. Referring to God's laws, King David said, 'Your word is a **lamp** to my feet and a **light** to my path', Psalms 119:105. This simply means that God's laws are clear, shining brightly and well defined for everyone to easily understand; and if clarification is

necessary, Christ and those ruling with Him will do the interpretation.(2 Peter 1:20)

There will be no more postponement of hearings which are bound to wear out the poor and the less privilege; no more dilatory tactics coming from the counsel of an apparently guilty client; no more decisions in favor of the highest bidder. Bribery is anathema in the kingdom of God, as it has always been denounced in the Bible ever since (Amos 5:12; 1 Samuel 8:3).

There will be no more impeachment trials because in the first place, no one will occupy positions of authority unless he or she is qualified according to God's standards. Swift, just, fair and equitable judgment will be implemented. The judges of tomorrow will make sure God's justice system will be carried out without fear or favor. That system is principally anchored on the Word of God - the only accurate 'weighing scale' that determines right from wrong, truth from lies, real from imagined, good from evil.

God's justice system is simplified. If the legal minds will consider adapting His principles, the cry against human rights violation will die down. The 'intellectual' exercise to map out judicial reforms becomes unnecessary. The lamentable cliché 'justice delayed is justice denied' will vanish from one's vocabulary; the much vaunted dictum 'no one is above the law' will become a reality.

With men at the helm of government today, these longings will remain just that - a perpetual longing. But Jesus is coming to rule and set up His kingdom which will finally implement a justice system that is fair, equitable, and impartial. So, will true justice ever happen? Definitely, upon Jesus' return! **AG**

True Freedom

By Ferdie S. Padilla

*And ye shall know
the truth, and the
truth shall make
you free.
John 8:32*



Most countries celebrate a unique day in its national life. Many declare it as a national holiday. For the majority of nations, that day is the day when they became independent from their past colonial masters. As such, it is commemorated with great celebration. That day is generally called independence day. It is the day when these nations observe their respective freedoms and independent statehood. When we look at each nation's history, we learn that freedom is much valued. Many died for this freedom that most nations are now enjoying.

Does the Bible have to say anything about freedom? The answer of course is yes. But the kind of freedom it talks about is even greater than the "freedom" we are accustomed to. The "freedom" we know is completely different from the freedom the Bible promises. When we come to understand what freedom is as the Bible says, we can really say, now this is true and real freedom. In this article, we will be listing down three items we can say that the Bible says we should be free from.

Three Biblical Items About Freedom

1.) Freedom from lies – There is an interesting statement in the New Testament found in John 8:31 - 32 (NIV) "To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." This verse says we have to be free from something and that the truth will do that for us. Obviously, this something which we must be free from are lies, the direct opposite of truth. In this world, people have literally lived lives built on lies because they sincerely believe them to be true. As such, these lies bound

them up, put them in chains because it directed people to live according to them. It cut them off from living a life pleasing to God.

Today, the lie that Sunday is the rest day for us Christians is prevalent. Christendom as we know it upholds this teaching as the truth when in fact the Bible does not say so. Therefore, people still work on the real Sabbath day, and forfeit a great blessing they could have had, had they known the truth. People also believe that we have immortal souls which will either be burned in hell for eternity if we do evil in this lifetime or the opposite, we could forever live a blissful life in heaven strumming a harp for eternity. And these lies generate a lot of other lies and everything gets confusing because of these lies. The lie that we will be burned in hell forever does not tally with what we know about God – that He is a merciful God. Many people become confused because of this. Theologians would find it difficult to explain these things to people. People also believe that anything could be eaten. We see one of the results today. Various diseases unheard of before come out because many people eat all sort of things the Bible prohibits. So one of the things the Bible says we have to be free from are lies. That is, our minds should be free from false ideas and beliefs because our ideas and beliefs dictate how we live our lives. Christ says the "truth will set you free". But how does the Bible define truth? The Bible definition is the simplest one we could ever come across and yet the most profound one. It is found in John 17:17 (NIV) "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth." Very straightforward definition, right? God's word is truth. And yet the definition is profound. God's word contains the knowledge that gives us the keys on how to live our lives. In other words, the truth all we need to

know to be free from the lies that abound in our society today can only be found in the pages of your Bible. So it will always pay to read and meditate on what we learn from the Bible and whatever truth we learn, we should keep it in our hearts and minds. We should cling to them because they will shield us from so many lies in this world.

2.) Freedom from sin – The second thing we should be free from is a direct consequence of the first one. We should be free from sin. If there is one thing common to all of mankind, whether “free or slave”, is that we are all prisoners or slaves of sin. Jesus Himself said this in John 8:34 (NIV) “Jesus replied, “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” All of mankind has sinned. The truth of the matter is, the lies we have believed all our days before coming to the knowledge of the truth, is a major contributing factor to why we became slaves to sin. We did not know they were lies and led us to break the Sabbaths, break the food laws and the tithing law. But the law that tells us what sin is, is very much in effect. Whether we know it is in existence or not, does not matter, because ignorance of the law is not an excuse. We still sinned. Sin has a hold on us. And the sad thing is, mankind, in general don’t know they are slaves to sin. That is why many continue to engage in the things that the Ten Commandments prohibit. Thieves abound everywhere, whether people occupying high positions of government or to the ordinary person. Idolatry is common nowadays. And this is not limited to bowing before or worshipping idols or images. Today, the self has become a god before the one true God. People serve their personal interests and pleasures more than the one true God. Even we Christians, from time to time, fall into the trap of sin. We are enticed into it

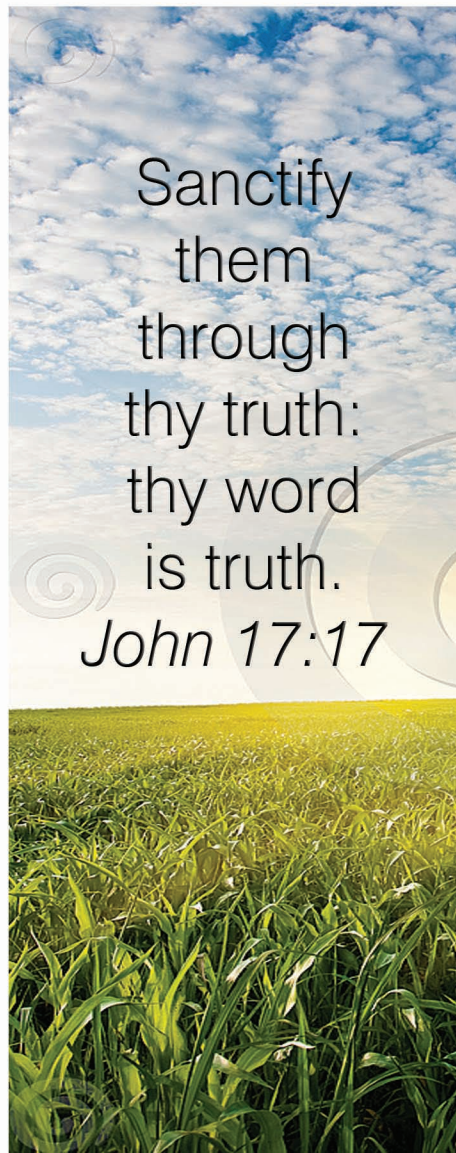
when we succumb to our weaknesses. Therefore, there is a need to be free from sin. Why? Because as Romans 6:23 (NIV) says “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” And that leads us to the third item in our list from which we must be free from.

3.) Freedom from death – If you notice, the previous 2 items we touched on eventually lead to this third item, the natural consequence of believing a lie and sinning. And this death we are talking about is not the physical death. We are talking of the second death. What is the second death? Again, we go to the Bible definition: Revelation 21:8 (NIV) “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually

immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” This verse is saying, all who persist in doing evil (and some examples were mentioned here) would eventually be thrown into a fiery lake of burning sulfur to be burned up, not burned forever. In other words, their existence would be completely erased. This is not what we were destined for. God created us so that we may share in His glory in His coming Kingdom. But with the lies we have believed previously and sin having a strong grip on us, we are now in real danger of dying – forever. Death is a real threat to all of us. If we die for our sins, that would be the end of us. There would be no more us to talk about entering the Kingdom of God.

The Liberator - Jesus Christ

The good news is that God would not allow these things to enslave us and prevent us from qualifying for His Kingdom. We were all helpless in the face of all these things. But He sent us a Liberator, His very Son Jesus Christ. In fact He is the only one qualified to be our Liberator. Let’s take a closer look. The Bible says, we can be free from all of the lies that surround us. Let’s go back to John 8:31-32. In verse 31, Christ says that if we hold on to His teaching, we truly are His disciples and that eventually we will know the truth. So the key to knowing the truth is knowing first what are the true teachings of Jesus Christ. Are we left without a clue as to what they are? Of course not. They can be found in the pages of the Bible. All we have to do is simply read them as He presents them, without any preconceived bias or opinion. We have to accept them as He states them. We also have to live by these teachings because only by doing so could we understand better these truths. How can we prove to ourselves the benefits of God’s



commandments if we do not observe them in the first place? How can we understand the Sabbath is the true rest day when we don't keep it? But if we do them, then we are a step closer to the freedom that God promised.

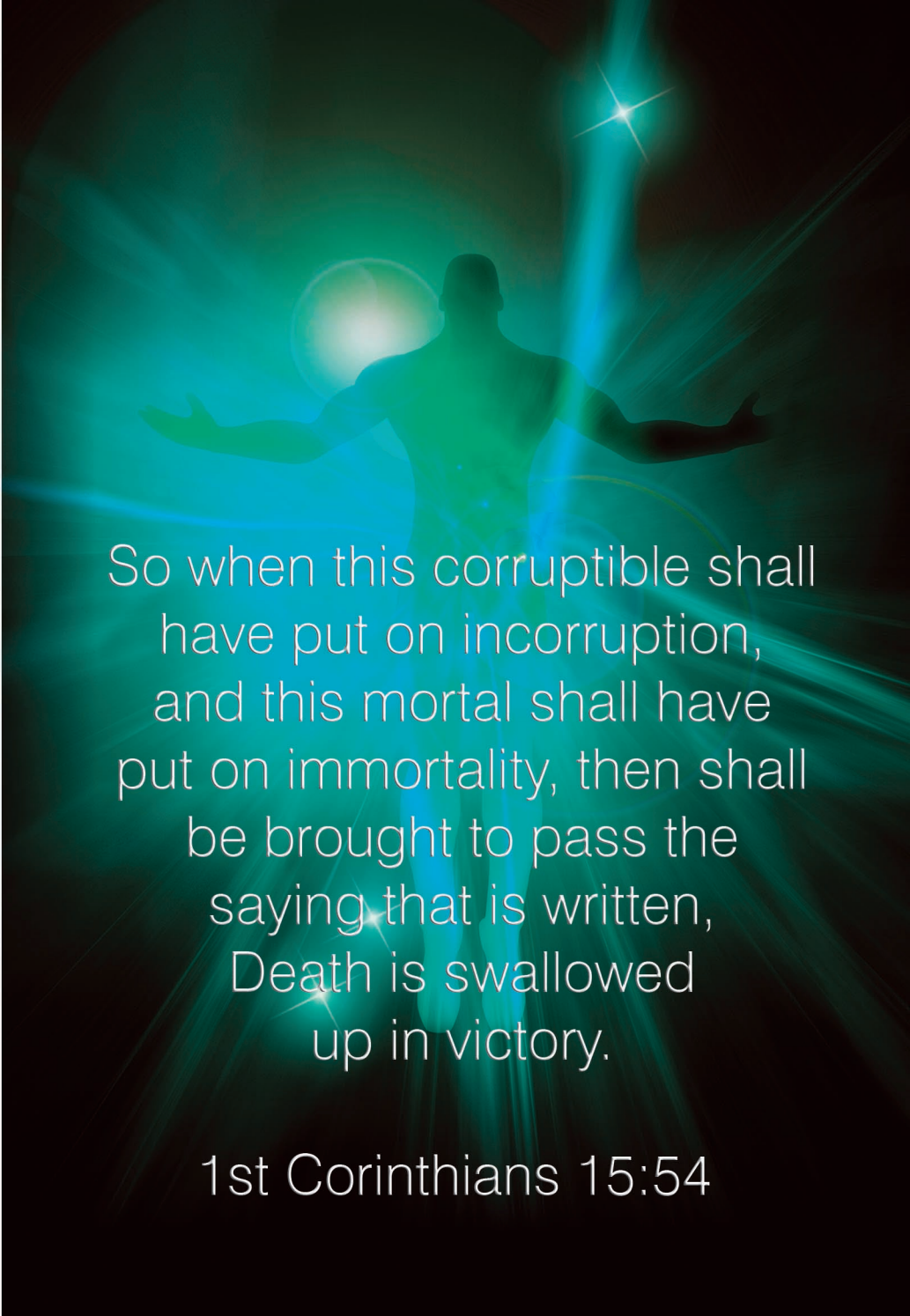
The Lord Himself said we can be free from sin. Let us go to John 8:34 - 36 (NIV) "Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." Wonderful and very comforting verses, right? Christ Himself will free us from sin so we can take our places in God's ruling family! Sin will never be our master but only Christ! How did Christ accomplish that? He died in our stead, freeing us from the slavery of sin and eventually from the death penalty. Only Christ can do that for all of mankind. The Son has set us free from the slavery of sin and He says that we will be free indeed. If that is not freedom, then what is?

The ultimate step to freedom also comes through Christ. If we have been freed from the lies that we were accustomed to before and continue to live by the truth, eventually sin will no longer have a right to claim us as slaves. Why? Because Christ has already freed us. He ransomed us with His very life. And if we continue to live faithfully as God instructed us, we have a glorious resurrection awaiting us. This resurrection is made possible through Christ Himself. We read in 1 Corinthians 15:21 - 23 (NIV) "For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man [that is, Christ]. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him." We are expecting a resurrection in the future at Christ's return because we belong to Him, because we have

remained faithful to the truth and lived by His teachings. When this happens, we read in 1 Corinthians 15:54 (NIV) "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." Death will no longer have a hold on us because we would have become immortal. That completes our freedom.

Someday we will experience true

freedom as God promised us. We will no longer be slaves of sin and death. Someday, this physical body we have will be transformed into a glorious spiritual body. Someday, we will no longer be subject to illnesses or pain. Someday, we will be taking up our places in the Family of God as His sons and daughters. All of these are made possible by our only one True Liberator, our Lord Jesus Christ. Until He comes to finally free us, let us remain true and faithful to Him and our Father. **AG**



So when this corruptible shall
have put on incorruption,
and this mortal shall have
put on immortality, then shall
be brought to pass the
saying that is written,
Death is swallowed
up in victory.

1st Corinthians 15:54

LAZARUS AND THE RICH MAN

By Rene D. Corpuz

Jesus likes to deliver his message through parables (Matthew 13:34), and strange as it may seem, even his disciples often had to ask Him for an explanation of what they mean (Matthew 13:36, 15:15, Mark 4:34). There are parables which were not intended to make the meaning clearer but were meant to hide them from those it wasn't intended for (Matthew 13:11). Interestingly, there are parables which instead of being taken as a lesson and a warning the way it should be, instead enrage a particular group among the listeners and would have grabbed Jesus if not for the place being public (Mark 12:12).

Jesus, according to Bible Scholars, delivered between 42 to 52 parables. They cover a wide range of topics pertaining to the Kingdom of God, human relationships, forgiveness, prayer, etc.

One of the more intriguing, and often-debated upon is the parable of "Lazarus and the Rich Man" in Luke 16:19-31.

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art

tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

Traditionally, this parable is presented as like that of a "heaven and hell" scenario. However, the Jewish culture does not teach that those who lived good lives go to heaven when they die, and those who lived wickedly go to an ever-burning sea of fire or a multi-level place of punishment. The Jews believe that there will be a resurrection in the distant future for those who had died (*this is what Martha believed as mentioned in John 11:24, though Jesus told her He could raise the dead as He "is" the Resurrection, v.25-26*).

A careful analysis of the parable presents a few problematic situations with 21st Century beliefs and teachings concerning heaven and hell, that is, if we assume that our existing beliefs are true. However, if we approach the parable from what the traditional beliefs of the Jews were at the time Jesus delivered the parable, such contradictions we face today would not exist. For example, the Jews do not believe that there are souls that go to heaven or to an ever-burning lake of fire immediately upon death; what they do believe in is a resurrection in the future of those that have died, both good and wicked. From this perspective, Jesus makes a lot of sense to his listeners. Had Jesus delivered the same parable in our time, with our existing belief system, we would have flooded Jesus with so many questions such as "why do you teach a resurrection when we have always been taught that those who had already died were already judged and sentenced either to go to heaven or to "hell"? In fact, nearly all of the teachings of Jesus concerning those who had died would not make sense to nearly every Christian born under the Catholic, Protestant, and most so-called "Christian" faith of our time. One such statement of the Lord Jesus in

John 3:13 states, "And no man hath ascended up to heaven..." goes into conflict with the entire Christian belief that the good people go to heaven immediately when they die.

For now, let us dismiss everything that we espouse concerning the afterlife, and stick with the belief Jesus himself is teaching, and let us re-visit the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. We will find that discarding our existing belief system concerning heaven and hell will help us better understand the parable.

In Hell He Lifted Up His Eyes

At the beginning of the parable, Jesus tells us how the two main characters lived opposite lives. One is very rich, and one is beggar poor. In due time, both of them died. The beggar was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom, while the rich man was "simply" buried. Take note that the angels did not carry Lazarus up to heaven, but into Abraham's bosom (*Remember, Jesus taught that "no man hath ascended up to heaven..." therefore, wherever "Abraham's bosom" is, does not mean going to heaven, after all, Jesus does not teach that the good go to heaven*). Next we are told what happened to the rich man, "in hell

he lift up his eyes, being in torments..." (Luke 16:23). At this point, let me explain a thing about "hell". The Greek word translated "hell" used in this instance is *Hades*, which means *the grave*. This makes sense considering that we are told that "the rich man also died, and was buried" (v.22). Lifting up his eyes in hell simply means from the grave he opened his eyes, and finds himself in torments. Simply put, the rich man was resurrected, came back to life; this too makes sense considering that the Jews, including Jesus, believe that there will be a future resurrection of all those who have died (John 11:24, Daniel 12:2, 13). Both the prophet Daniel and the Lord Jesus consistently taught that those who have died are "dead and buried" ; even the apostle Peter spoke of King David as still being "dead and buried" after Jesus had already gone up to heaven for quite some time (Acts 2:29). This is all consistent with the parable Jesus presented.

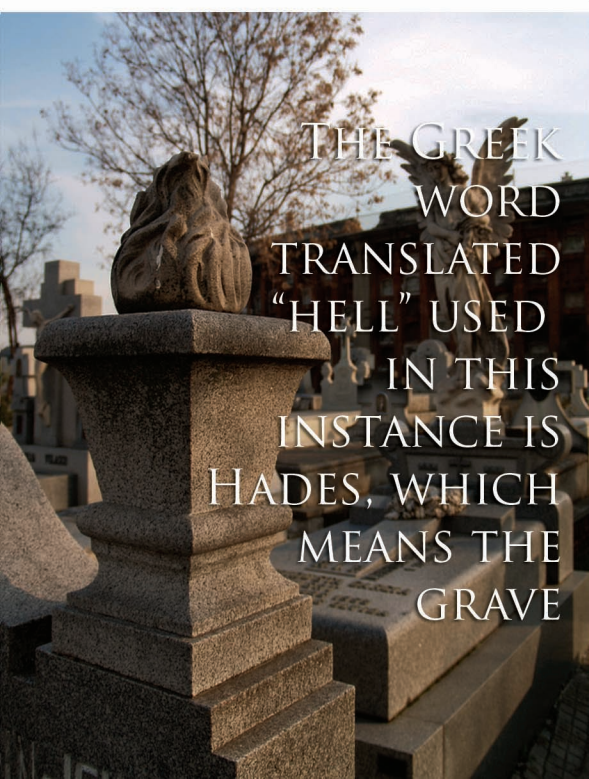
The conversation that followed between the rich man and Abraham was particularly interesting. Let me remind you though, this is NOT a conversation between two "real" people, this is simply part of the story that Jesus was narrating to illustrate the lesson He is about to deliver. The exchange of words we read here are not from two "living" people but from Jesus Himself who merely used these two characters as His main players in the story. The words that came out of the rich man and of Abraham were nothing more than scripts. They were in fact Jesus' own words. Most preachers err at this point by trying to interpret that the rich man and Abraham were real, living people. They were not. There are those who would even present the parable as if the rich man, Lazarus and Abraham could have changed the outcome of their fates. They can't, their "roles" are fixed, they are at the mercy of

their story-teller, Jesus. They are nothing more than characters in the story - in the parable. Their actions and their words were part of a scenario presented by Jesus to deliver a lesson worth considering; this is something we all need to understand in all the parables of the Lord; the characters in His parables cannot change the outcome of the stories they are in—their roles are fixed, otherwise, the parable would not make any sense. The hearers of the story however, can change the outcome of their own stories once they understood the parable. Adding "what if" scenarios to the parables presented by the Lord are a pointless exercise. The parables are already "what if" scenarios to begin with.

A Dip of Water Please

In this discussion presented to us by the Lord between the rich man and Abraham, the former requests for a dip of water to cool his tongue. Abraham told him this is not possible (*in retrospect*, we have to realize this is Jesus himself, through the character Abraham, telling the rich man that his request or prayer can no longer be granted at this point). Jesus, through the dialogue between the rich man and Abraham, tells us, that in this resurrection, those who were on Abraham's side can no longer be of help to them on the other. While in the parable we are told there is a great gulf that cannot be crossed, all it's meant for was to prevent people from crossing sides, but obviously not meant to prevent either side from having a good conversation.

The conversation gets more interesting though as it progresses. The rich man having been told there is no more help for him is presented as one who realizes that perhaps there is help for his brothers. We are given the impression that these brothers are still alive in a different place, time and situation than he is. For the purpose of His presentation,



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the Lord placed two different timelines, “the present and the future” (or the past and the present, whichever perspective one is viewing it from...) as if they were running together. The Lord, through the rich man, also implied that the way the rich man’s brothers lived their lives, being not very different from that of the rich man, are likely to follow the same fate as he is in now.

Herein is the warning that Jesus clearly delivers and that many of us should take heed for we are very likely living a very similar lifestyle. The rich man requested Abraham to send Lazarus over to warn his brothers, but the request was denied. Abraham told him that whatever they need they already have, Moses and the Prophets—a reference to the first five books of the Old Testament Bible, and the writings of the Prophets. Abraham then warns that those who would refuse to listen to the writings of Moses and

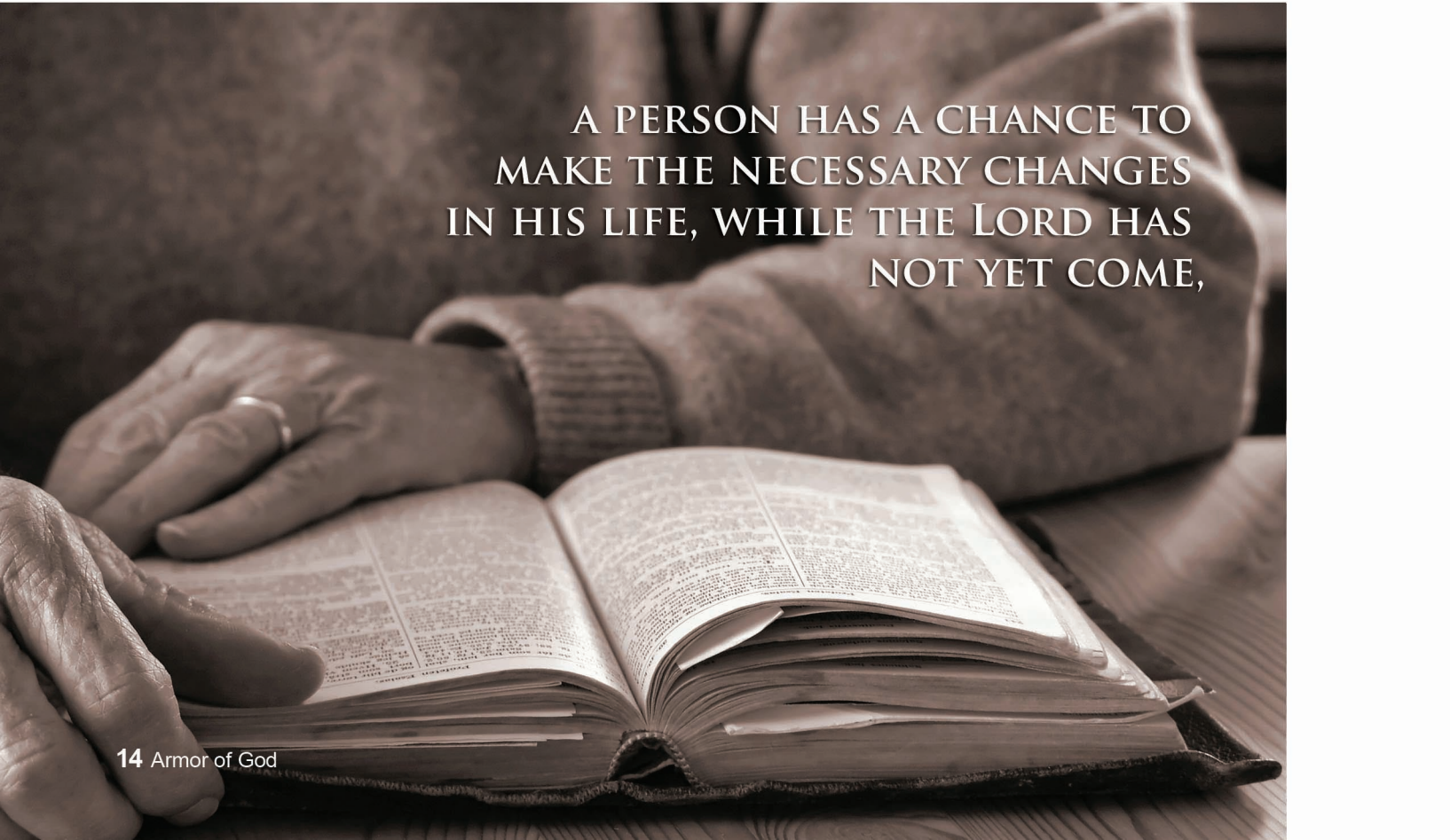
the Prophets aren’t likely to listen even if someone from the dead comes back. Jesus, one who had died and resurrected, had so few a people who listened and believed in Him even after the event, proving that what He had spoken through this parable is indeed true.

The Time is Now!

Many parables share a common “finality”: The parable of the wedding banquet (Matthew 22), of the ten virgins (Matthew 25), that of the parable of the talents (Matthew 25) and the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. In each case, a person has a chance to make the necessary changes in his life, while the Lord has not yet come, or while his mortal life has not yet reached its end. After that, the chance of salvation that God gives to those whom he will save today simply ends. There seems to be no indications of “second chances” that will be given to those who

failed their “chance of a lifetime”.

The warning and the message is relatively simple. Moses brings us to the beginning, to God’s law, our guide to salvation. The Prophets are messengers whose job is to call people to return to God. However, because of the false notions and misinterpretations that we placed on the parable, we lost the message. Jesus, thru the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, and a few other parables that share the same theme, brings us back to the laws of God, to salvation. We are clearly warned, and told that if we do not desire to suffer a similar fate with that of the Rich Man, we need to return to the Law of Moses. And as surprising as it may seem, central to the Law of Moses, is the sacrificial “Lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). Central to salvation, is the Lord Jesus. If you understand these things, rejoice and be glad. **AG**



A PERSON HAS A CHANCE TO
MAKE THE NECESSARY CHANGES
IN HIS LIFE, WHILE THE LORD HAS
NOT YET COME,

[Continued from page 2]

Laws, if applied diligently and observed faithfully, serve as our protection. It is designed to supply the human need for self-preservation. While many try to profess eloquence in all matters pertaining to the laws of the land, the determination and the resolve to abide by and uphold it is definitely wanting. Are we in the stage where the virtues that are expected to yield high moral values are already in the verge of obsolescence?

The apostle Paul predicted: Know this also, that in the last days grievous times will be at hand. For men will be self-lovers, money-lovers, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, unyielding, false accusers, without self-control, savage, despisers of good, traitors, reckless, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it.,2 Timothy 3:1-5.

Are more laws needed to counter this trend? Or is it high time to seek guidance from the original Lawgiver who is able to save and to destroy? (James 4:12) After all, His laws are not complicated, easy to comprehend, you can count it easily with your ten fingers.

No wonder David proclaimed that the "law of God is a perfect law", Psalms 19:7; while James referred to it as the "perfect law of liberty", James 1:25. And these laws are listed in Exodus the 20th chapter. If everyone intends to use it as the primary guide in life, the need to create more and more laws will significantly diminish.

-Eleno S. Mellomida-

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