

# Philippians 3:12-14

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## Pressing On!

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## DON'T BE SURPRISED WHEN GOD UPSETS YOUR APPLE-CART.

*HE is God, and He knows what He is doing! Your home may follow, your 'temple', your health, your job, your retirement, your holidays, etc. - but all of that in order to launch you into something you couldn't even have dreamt of... Just think of:*



- Noah** - his world totally collapsed.
- Abraham** - had to leave behind all that was near and dear.
- Lot** - held on to his 'apple-cart' for dear life, but God 'upset' it anyway...
- Joseph**, a teenager - was sold as a slave in a foreign country, then imprisoned through malicious accusations.
- Moses**, considered a prince in Egypt - fled for his life to a 'precarious' desert existence of 40 years.
- Gideon** - was asked to put his life on the line.
- Ruth** - turned from her family's 'apple-carts' and her 'gods' to embrace the God and the people of her mother-in-law.
- Jonathan**, the crown prince - gladly gave up all rights to the throne.
- Micaiah**, son of Imlah - suffered prison and worse, all for being truthful.
- Elisha** - voluntarily cut his lines of security and comfort.
- Jeremiah** - being faithful, no matter what, didn't shrink from grave accusations and horrible persecution.
- Daniel** and friends - were exiled to Babylon and turned into eunuchs.
- Nehemiah** - voluntarily gave up his position in the king's court.
- Esther**, a young Jewish girl - had thrust on her the dubious honor of becoming one of the wives of the (gentile) king.
- Mary**, another young girl - was ready to face ridicule, scorn and scandal.
- The 12 Disciples** (incl. Matthias) - expected major upsets to their 'apple-carts'; the sacrifice of family, homes, jobs, income, their very lives.
- The woman of Mark 14** - broke the most precious thing she had.
- Barnabas**, a landowner - became a landless tramp in the Lord's work.
- Deacon Philip** - had no choice; he fled Jerusalem for his life, losing his home, the meetings of the saints, and his ministry (or so he thought).
- Saul of Tarsus** - surrendered all prospects (and dreams) of becoming a greatly respected Reverend Rabbi in Jerusalem.

Would you know where to find **Micaiah** in your Bible? What a prophet! We don't have any Bible book written by him, and only just a few verses about one particular day. How easily this obscure prophet could have kept his 'apple-cart' on course. If only he'd heeded the kind suggestions made to him. But his reaction was clear:

**"WHATEVER THE LORD SAYS TO ME, THAT I WILL SPEAK!"** His was the only sensible, the only *possible* answer for a true prophet. He may have had his dreams of a mega ministry like Eliza's or Elisha's, but when God upset *that* apple-cart, Micaiah still let God be God!





# Live It Up!

## Lessons from the Letter to Titus

Howel Jones with Jim van Heiningen

Writing probably from Corinth (more or less at the time of his first letter to Timothy), Paul goes to some effort to keep up a live contact with Titus, “a true son in their common faith”. Both had been actively engaged in the work of “planting congregations” in various towns on the island of Crete, which - centuries earlier - used to be called Caphtor and is considered the geographical origin of the Philistines. It is thought that Paul, after his first imprisonment in Rome (Phil. 1), did what he had been intending for some time. He must have made the further journey to Spain (Rom. 15:24 & 28), and on this venture could well have been accompanied by Titus. After spending some time in Spain, they would have gone back in easterly direction, having booked passage on a ship that could accommodate them. They would have passed by Malta, where Paul, Aristarchus and Luke had been shipwrecked so dramatically after sailing from Crete (Acts 28). Then the incredible happens: after all that, Paul was back in Crete! And the Lord must have confirmed that after the ‘sowing in tears’, it was now time for ‘reaping in joy’!

This letter seems to indicate that the apostle was intending to send his missive with Artemas or Tychicus, and so deliver it to Titus – see chapter 3. However, others were already there with Titus, like Zenas (‘the lawyer’) and Apollos, undoubtedly sharing in the work load.

And, indeed, a lot of work remained. In the first place, Titus is told to set those things in order that were still lacking. He was to appoint “elders” in every congregation, men who were to lead by example. These are to be “above reproach”, men of integrity, being good examples, both in their family life and personal demeanor. As such, they were to stand out among the many ordinary Cretans who tended to be liars, insubordinate, divisive, and destructive in their behavior. Sadly the Jews among them, referred to by Paul as ‘those of the circumcision’, weren’t any better than the Cretan gentiles. In contrast, Christian believers are to embody godliness with the changed life and testimony that it represents. Such a ‘saintly’ life doesn’t necessarily come

about spontaneously. Titus is told to “rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” – and thus in their walk.

All believers are to exhibit good behavior whatever their age, gender, status or position in society. There is instruction for men and women, whether older or younger and also to ‘slaves’ and masters. Within their own spheres, all have responsibilities to discharge and opportunities to exploit. Titus is to teach them, and they in turn are to make good use of Christian virtue to be worthy influences wherever they are and whatever opportunity comes their way.

It is such exemplary behavior that is consistent with God’s declared purpose for his people. Illustrating that reasoning, Paul makes one of those marvelous encapsulations of gospel truth that we find in the New Testament: He states that “*the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people!*”.

That ‘*appearing in Grace*’ will be followed by his ‘*appearing in Glory*’. Once the salvation brought by his Grace has been experienced, Grace continues in action: it **teaches** the new believers to be true disciples – they must be ready for when the Glory appears!

The response of faith to that message of “good news”, and the transformation that follows, mean renouncing old ways of ungodly living. In other letters, Paul uses terms like, ‘**putting off the old man**’. Deliberately, those that are believers in the Risen Christ, may now be living godly lives in this present evil world, as they look forward in anticipation to the coming again of Jesus to gather to himself this “*special*”, distinctive people whose aspiration and purpose is to demonstrate good works as an expression of a ‘*more excellent way*’. That sentiment is echoed time and time again in Paul’s letters, none more so than his reference in Philippians to the believers (and their positive behavior) as being a “*colony of heaven*” (Phil. 3:20).

That will not happen automatically. It is a matter of discipline and deliberate action, and needs to be taught and learned. As in other epistles to churches and individuals, he stresses the responsibility they have to “*work out their own salvation*” and to use the mind to realize in practice the fact that they have become new creatures, born again, redeemed from their old life by the “*precious blood of Christ*”. No longer are they to be dis-

tracted by trivial pursuits or distracting controversies but devote themselves to good works.

May we draw your attention to 3 important points that might be lost in a superficial reading of Paul’s 3 chapters:

1) It is of note that Paul refers three times to the Savior as being **God himself** (1:3; 2:13 & 3:4).

2) Paul classes himself and the other workers with the worst sinners, and just as totally dependent on that Savior for salvation by his mercy, as anybody else.

3) In 3:9-11, Paul tells Titus (and us) how to detect and reject a “heretic”. The problem may start with the “foolish disputes”, etc., etc. of verse 9. Then, in verse 10, we find a (fully formed) “divisive man” (NKJV) – in Greek the word used is “*hairetikós*”, which has been transliterated into English as “heretic”. It only occurs here in the New Testament. So why ‘translate’ it as “divisive man”? This is done because the concept points to a man with ‘favourite ideas’, ‘gut feelings’, ‘hobby-horse doctrines’, in short, someone (and it’s not only men who do this) who in practice sets himself ‘above Scripture’, and, while claiming to be a Bible Christian, has in reality become a “sectarian” (cf. Jer. 23:28-29). Paul says, ‘when you detect him, reject him, before things get out of hand!’

Surely God’s Spirit is holding this up for us today. Isn’t present day Christianity trying to do the exact opposite: an impossible balancing act? While professing to hold on to the Bible, countless ‘pulpit heretics’ are nowadays given free-range.

What else can we learn from this letter with its direct commands and illuminating insights? If nothing else, it is a reminder of the purpose of God in the gospel: it is to **redeem a people for himself**, a people who not only appreciate being saved from sin and its consequences – at a price – but who also have a **responsibility** as new creatures to display a different life style, because they no longer live to themselves but “*unto him who loved them and gave himself for them!*”. And, it is a reminder that such new living is the consequence of deliberate actions using the intelligence of Scripture, enabled by the Holy Spirit. It applies both at leadership- and oversight levels and in the routine situations each one of us finds oneself in, knowing that it is “**God working within you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure**”.



# How to Save Your Marriage Alone!

**YOUR MARRIAGE IS IN TROUBLE!** You are considering options:

1. You can break your vows, and divorce.
2. Tolerate a bad situation, and busy yourself in something else.
3. OR, you can sit at the feet of Jesus and be empowered to build an intimate, Christ-honoring marriage.

**IF YOU ARE LEANING TOWARD DIVORCE, JUST KNOW THIS:**

1. Divorce is more painful than death - it's never really over!
2. When couples run away from their problems by divorcing and remarrying, "there are usually four miserable people, instead of just two (apart, that is, from extremely unhappy children as well). Why spread misery?"
3. More second marriages fail than first marriages.

**HOWEVER**, when you choose the pathway of irrevocable commitment to your mate and your marriage — regardless of how troubled your relationship may seem — at the very least you will be glad when you stand before God in the day of judgment; and, even now, you will find that choice leading you into a place of agape-love, peace, and personal growth— even if your spouse does not positively respond for the saving of the marriage.

**BUT MAKE NO MISTAKE**, the healing of a broken marriage can be a painful process. It does not have to be; but it can also be a LONG process. **WHY?** Because, torn relationships involve pain, regardless of what you do about them. **HOWEVER**, — it is far better to suffer (if suffer you must) for doing right, than for doing wrong (1 P. 2:19-21)! The Holy Spirit makes it clear that God's favor and blessing shine on the one who patiently suffers in order to do His will. Meeting your marriage problems in a biblical manner is **ALWAYS** productive rather than pointless; and whatever hurts your encounter will be less damaging than the long-term effects of divorce would be.

"**THE VERY WORD** divorce should be cut out of the vocabulary of a couple when they marry..." A lady testified that the turbulent events of the past year had driven her to grow emotionally and spiritually while she "loved her husband back" to their marriage. She said, "It's been all gain for me. I'm a different person now. The process was humbling, but it was worth it!" A man said, "During the time when I was trying to win my wife's love and hold our family together, sometimes I got so tired of rejection that I didn't feel anything except a determination to do what God said in His Word and leave the results with Him. The only thing I was sure of was that somehow God would work it out for my good because He promised that in His Word!"

**EVEN SO**, you or someone you know are in the middle of shock, hurt, rejection, emotional confusion, temptation to bitterness, and of course, pressures from all sides that sometimes make you want to give up; while others are in the midst of rank rebellion. This article is designed to help save your marriage, transform it, and glorify God! **AND BY THE WAY:** Contrary to popular opinion, **ONE** person, being as clay in the Master's hands, **CAN SAVE A MARRIAGE!**

**COUNSELOR** Anne Kristin Carroll says, "In my experience most torn marriages are brought to new life, new vitality by the interest, basically, of only one party." Dr. Ed Wheat states, "I have seen numerous marriages saved when only one partner applied biblical principles in a whole-hearted commitment to the mate and the marriage— in the great majority of cases, the outcome depends squarely on the committed partner's ability to behave consistently in accord with biblical principles designed by the Author of marriage. So, in a very literal sense, **it is all up to you!** You need not expect your partner to do anything constructive about the marriage, if he or she wants out.

**CLARIFYING YOUR THOUGHTS:** When the Bible says, "Gird up the loins of your mind" (1 P. 1:13), it means to get your mental powers in a state of alertness for proper action. Without delay, you must make the choice to set aside time for quiet, uninterrupted Bible study and prayerful consideration of God's plan for your situation. Example: At the beginning of his Christian life, Dr. Ed Wheat's wife and daughters were unresponsive to both him and Jesus, his Savior. The prolonged rejection was painful. **HOWEVER**, that rejection drove him to the Word of God so as to learn what he should do.

**TIME AND AGAIN**, he had to 'run all over his feelings' and simply love his family out of **OBEDIENCE** to Christ. In time, his obedience to Christ became **PLEASURE** as well as responsibility— in fact, the obedience took on bright colors of **JOY!** This was not because of a positive response from his family; but simply the **JOY** that comes when we live to please and honor **JESUS**, regardless of people and circumstances!

**ONE YOUNG WIFE** was ready to dissolve her marriage until a friend in her garden club led her to the Lord. "I only knew two Scriptures at the beginning," the wife said, "but they were exactly what I needed: 'God is not a man, that he should lie' (Numbers 23:19), and 'With God nothing shall be impossible' (Luke 1:37). With those truths as a foundation, I began to study the Bible, desperately trying to dig out God's purpose for marriage and all that He had to say about it."

"**I FOUND OUT** for myself that if I were to obey **JESUS**, then I would have to become committed to my marriage and my husband, even though he was involved with another woman and we were on the verge of divorce. Coming to this decision didn't make things any easier emotionally at first, but it did show me a clear path of action, and the situation actually became less complicated because there was no more confusion about what to do! I refused to sign the divorce papers. I had gathered evidence identifying the other woman and proving my husband's unfaithfulness. I destroyed it all. I didn't need it anymore."

**GIVING YOURSELF** the '**No Divorce**' position is empowering! Now you can concentrate on forgiving; and as needed— being forgiven (1 P. 2:20-21). And let us be reminded that: "He replied, 'Have you never read that **He Who made them from the beginning made them male and female**'. And that He said, '**For this reason a man shall leave his father and**

**mother and shall be united firmly** (joined inseparably) **to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder!**'" (Mt. 19:4-6 AMP).

**AS YOU TRY** to gain clarity of thought concerning your marital situation viewed in light of the teaching of Scripture, let me remind you once more of the eternal principle that undergirds the biblical counsel we offer: It is God's will in every marriage for the couple to love each other with an absorbing spiritual, emotional, and physical attraction that continues to grow throughout their lifetime together.

**IT SHOULD BE** crystal clear that God intends for you and your mate to picture the love-bond of Christ and His church and that you must beware of substitutes who sometimes find their way into the vacuum of a troubled relationship. Obviously, infidelity and divorce are paths that move away from God's plan and blessing. But when you pour yourself into restoring love to your marriage, you can be sure that the force of His will is at work with you in the process.

**IT IS IMPORTANT** to fill your mind with uncompromising Biblical input: Biblical counseling, preaching, and teaching; good books and Bible-study material; and friends who will

*From:*

**"LOVE LIFE For Every Married Couple:**  
How to fall in love, Stay in love,  
Rekindle your love."

*By Dr Ed Wheat and Gloria Okes Perkins.*



affirm you in your commitment to your marriage. You need to take in truth from those who are as committed to the permanence of marriage as the Bible is. And don't listen to anyone else! Develop tunnel vision in this area as Proverbs 4:25-27 commands: **"Let your eyes look directly ahead, and let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you. Watch the path of your feet, and all your ways will be established. Do not turn to the right nor to the left; turn your foot from evil."** (NASB).

YOU NEED TO maintain this total mental commitment to the truth or you will be swamped by waves of human opinion and bad advice, sometimes from seemingly religious people. One young man came to me, confused because he had been told to do nothing to win back his wife. He had been told to concentrate on his vertical relationship with God. I said to him, "This is true, but you can please God only when you are doing what the Bible says you are to do. You must be right in line with God's Word". When we are in total accord with the Word, then we can relax and God has the freedom to work with us. He always works with us on the basis of the information that we have from His Word. So the more you know of the Word of God concerning marriage and love and His abhorrence of divorce, the more equipped you will be to let God do His full work and have His full way in your life.

A GODLY WIFE SAID, "I had to take a stand on this matter of outside influence. "Everyone has been anxious to give me advice about my marriage. I refuse to discuss it with people who hold an unbiblical viewpoint, or people who try to turn me against my husband, or people who make me feel sorry for myself, and encourage weakness in me. I can't afford to be around worldly friends anymore. They tear me down; they tear my husband down. They may mean well, but they are so misguided. I want to be with people who will stand with me, ENCOURAGE ME to be true to God's Word; and who will support me when I might falter... not to give me sympathy; but to encourage me to HONOR GOD'S WORD!"

WHEN YOUR MIND is settled and your commitment made, you will find that you no longer lie at the mercy of outside events, reacting to every new circumstance with fresh pain and bewilderment. Instead, your viewpoint becomes, "This is what I am going to do, no matter what, because it is God's way to do it. I can count on His wisdom, and I can trust Him with the results."

"I'M NOT standing by my marriage anymore on the basis of what the outcome will be," one woman told me. "People urge me to dump my husband, give up on him because he's made my life miserable; they tell me I deserve someone better; that I wouldn't have any trouble finding someone else to love me. My answer is that marriage is sacred; marriage is permanent; I am committed by my marriage vows; I am one flesh with my husband; and then I really shock them! I tell them that even if there is no happy ending for our marriage, I will not regret the stand I have taken. I will know that I made the right decision and followed the only course possible for me. I will have done all that I could."

"BUT MY TRUST is not in what I am doing," she added. "It is in God and His Word. He has a perfect, loving plan for my life, and He's wise enough and powerful enough to carry it out, if I cooperate by following His counsel. So I'm going to keep on obeying Him in my marriage and I'll leave the results with Him."

A HAPPY WIFE wrote me a note of thanks for my counsel which gave her the courage to stick with her marriage. She said, "One little thing you said to me meant so much. You said, 'So what!, if your husband doesn't tell you he loves you right now! I knew you were right.'" This wife found that putting up with a little rejection was worth it in the long run in order to have a revitalized marriage.

**IN SUMMARY, you need to give love to your mate, biblically speaking, whether you receive a response or not.**

THIS IS ALTOGETHER possible through agape-love. One wife, whose husband was in rebellion against God, said, "I tried to show him that my love for him did not depend on how he treated me. I still showed him physical affection. I said to him sometimes, 'I love you, no matter what you are doing right now, and I believe the Lord means for us to be together.' I sent him little cards with appropriate messages that expressed my caring while we were apart. And, do you know, when we reconciled, I found that he had saved every one of them!"

I ASKED SOME wives who had been through the experience to give me their list of do's and don'ts for any woman trying to save her marriage. Here are the excellent suggestions they compiled: (With very little needed adaptation, the list is also very helpful for husbands seeking to save their marriage!).

\*\*There can be no growth in your relationship as long as there is doubt as to your commitment to your marriage.

\*\*When your husband withholds his love, trust the Lord to meet your emotional needs. He won't let you down!

\*\*Give your husband honor, love, and biblical respect even though his actions do not deserve it. Give him warm acceptance no matter what. The more hopeless your situation is, the more your loving behavior is apt to be accepted as genuine.

\*\*Don't try to reform your husband! Just love him and live one day at a time.

\*\*Don't be bitter against anyone in the situation. Never turn your children against their father. Forgive!

\*\*Don't ask family or friends to take sides against your husband.

\*\*Don't discuss your intimate marriage problems. Don't give fuel to gossip. Confide in the Lord, your counselor, and perhaps a close Christian friend whom you can trust to keep silence.

\*\*Never discuss your problems with a friend of the opposite sex.

\*\*Spend as much time in the Word of God as possible.

\*\*Concentrate on yielding to God's work in changing YOU—asking Him to show you how to change, rather than concentrating on your partner's failures.

\*\*Do not separate. Encourage your husband to stay in the home.

\*\*Do not give your husband a divorce. Do all in your power to delay or prevent it.

\*\*If you must consult a lawyer, find a Christian one who will help you preserve your marriage.

\*\*Spend your time with people who encourage you to grow.

\*\*Do not overcompensate with your children. They need your love and stability while their father is gone, but they still need discipline. It will be hard to build a new love relationship with your husband, when he does come home, if the children are out of control.

\*\*Do not try to defend yourself from gossip or criticism. Keep your mouth shut. The Lord will fight for you.

\*\*Remember that the most innocent thing you say will get twisted. Avoid loose talk and do not listen to tale-bearing.

\*\*When you do anything (large or small) to pull the marriage apart, you are going against God's will. Let that be your guideline for all decisions.

\*\*Don't expect your husband to change overnight when he does come back home.

\*\*The hardest time may be when you are reconciled and you have a tendency to fall back into old habit patterns. Don't do it!

**"LOVE BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS!"**

# THE CHURCH'S WRINKLES

Jim van Heiningen

A South African brother once helped me to see that the Lord made the Church (i.e. a vital part of the Lamb's Bride) **spotless and without wrinkle or blemish** (Eph. 5:25-27). Nothing that we do, or stop doing, can alter that. It means that the countless millions of redeemed, now in his presence, are not there on their own merit, nor had God, somehow, looked the other way when He dealt with them. So, when they died, they were anything but perfect, YET... they were *in Christ*, and that was all that mattered.

Even if that part of the church which is still on earth were totally revived, filled, blessed, useful etc., etc., every single saint - once he's run his course - will still have plenty of wrinkles that were never ironed out...

So, why is he called a "saint" anyway? Because Christ is his sanctification! **"Of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption— that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord'"** (1 Cor. 1:30-31).

This wonderful truth stands firm as a rock; nothing can undo it or topple it, even if here on earth the 'saint' has sadly been unfaithful, remaining perhaps on a carnal level. The criterion is not whether he has attained to perfection, nor whether he has *grown* into spiritual adulthood, but whether he was ever truly *born* into spiritual life!

It has everything to do with the debate about 'who can be raptured?' You probably know that there are those who teach the rapture must be a *partial* one, because *how* can the Lord take carnal, defeated Christians to be with himself when He comes for the saints? Such teachers usually take the line that there will be two raptures. In the first one only "overcomers" are raptured - the ones who have "oil in their lamps". The others stay behind and will pass through the Great Tribulation which is their "purgatory". After that they *may* be worthy to be raptured as well.

The problem for such teachers is that all the rapture passages speak of one rapture only. Notice how Paul writes

about the resurrection of the believers, he says **"those who sleep in Jesus"** are brought from the dead with Christ (1 Thess. 4:14 & 16). He also calls them the **"dead in Christ"**. He gives us to understand, *not* that an elite only is caught out and caught up, but **ALL** true believers are - *no* exceptions! All who have died in Christ, whose body is now (seemingly) asleep-in-Jesus, are included. By grace, He has redeemed their spirit, their soul and now, in the Rapture, the body too experiences the full effects of that great Redemption.

In Jesus' words, **all** those that have the 'oil' - and thus the light - belong to the Bride! The five 'foolish virgins' have neither and are rejected. They do **not** represent true believers; they are 'name-Christians', with religion and tradition, but *without* Life. They have not experienced spiritual 'birth'. Oil in the Bible symbolizes the Holy Spirit.

Any religious person, perhaps a Bible-reader, can cosy up to true believers who are waiting for the Bridegroom, but if they are not born and indwelt by the Holy Spirit himself, they will be rejected. They will hear: **"I don't know you!"** And the door stays shut...

When Paul speaks of **all** who are truly born of the Spirit, he makes it clear - in Romans 8, for example - that there is a standard, a **normal level**, of Christian life in a world dominated by the evil 'prince of the world', it is the level of **"more than conquerors"**!

A good many centuries ago, when the religious folks realized that there was just no way to come up to that normal level, leave alone *live* on it, their imagination came up with the concept of "purgatory". And bingo!, they even found what seemed to be a reference to it in one of the Apocryphal books... Problem solved. No one can enter heaven with his sins, but there's Purgatory and prayers for the dead - just the 'back-door' that was needed!

However, neither the imaginary (RC) purgatory, nor the Great Tribulation have been appointed for dealing with the multitude of sins committed by the saints. **God himself** has made all the perfect provisions! It is the blood of

the Lamb, of course, that cleanses us from all sin! Without his precious blood, applied to a sinner, there would be no Forgiveness, no Life, no Rapture, and no Heaven. But there is more, ***we must*** **"all stand before the judgment seat of Christ... So then each of us shall give account of himself to God!"** (Lk. 19:12-26; Rom. 14:9-12; 1 Cor. 3:11-15; 2 Co. 5:6-11; 1 Pe. 5:4; 2 Jn. 8; Rev. 22:12). All those *with* eternal Life and Salvation, still have to give an account of their Christian life - as they lived it on earth - so that **"each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"**! There will be crowns and rewards - ***granted*** to the overcomers, but ***denied*** to the others!

Lot was not an 'overcomer', yet Peter called him "just", no less than three times, ***and*** he was 'raptured' out of Sodom (in the nick of time), but **not** because he was an exemplary saint. When Peter speaks about Noah, in similar circumstances, he does not call Noah "just", rather "a preacher of righteousness". It shows the difference between a 'loser' and an overcomer. Our Lord himself speaks of Noah and Lot, and in that context, He tells us very graphically that 'our' rapture will ***suddenly*** be upon the world. Born-again overcomers ***and*** losers will be missing **everywhere** (Mt. 24:36-42; Lk. 17:26-36)!

The bridegroom is approaching! What are the instructions for those who have the oil? Simply this: "Whatever you do, don't drop off to sleep!!" (Mt. 25:13). Rather than going to sleep, keep on nudging the sleeping 'Christians' around you! Make sure they ***do*** have their 'oil', and truly belong to Christ, **"sealed"** in and by the Holy Spirit for all eternity (Eph. 1:13-14).

Take note, any **"other gospel"** that offers comfort, is cursed (Gal. 1)! Side-tracking those who have heard the **WORD**, through 'other gospels', has always been a favorite stratagem of the enemy: from early Gnostics, Judaizers, Montanists, Arians, Pelagians, RC-ism, to modern teachings of 'universalism', 'sabbatism', 'campbellism', 'deistic evolutionism', 'preterism', 'prosperity', 'emerging church', you name it.

**"Many deceivers have gone out into the world... Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward!"** (2<sup>nd</sup> John 7-8).





# Letter from Uganda

Stephen Rand, of England (in "Guinea Pig for Lunch"), tells of his experience among AIDS patients in Uganda, some years ago, and how one young Christian responded to the challenge of extreme need, when no way had been found yet to effectively combat the condition.

AIDS stands for "acquired immune deficiency syndrome", caused by HIV ("human immunodeficiency virus"). The virus rapidly spread from husbands to wives, when neither of the two realized that he picked up HIV through an extra-marital encounter. Once the man was found to be HIV positive, the wife realized that she too was likely 'doomed'. As many, many millions of Africans succumbed, the children (often a lot of them) were left in the care of a grandmother, an aunt, or nobody at all. Sin causes heartbreak and great suffering! Especially among the most vulnerable. The scourge of HIV/AIDS is just one example.

They had started programmes of care for PWAs - "People with AIDS". Which was why that particular morning we had arrived to video a women's group at Kampala Baptist Church, who met in a little prayer chapel by the side of the main building. I was acutely aware that I had never, so far as I knew, ever met anyone with AIDS. I had thought about the theology and the principles, I had been perturbed by the unpleasant and unbiblical judgementalism of some evangelical reactions to the illness - but I had not had to meet anyone facing this particular sentence of death, and in a country which had the barest elements of healthcare available.

As we approached the women round the corner of the church building, we could hear them singing: 'God is so good, he's so good to me!' I could scarcely believe my ears. This was one of those moments when I felt a complete pygmy in my faith. These were people whose faith in a loving God was deep and real, or they were most cruelly deluded. I had already learned from John that the church had accepted that their response to those who were HIV positive was not dependent on the reason for their infection. But discovering that some of these women were faithful wives whose legacy from their husbands was to be illness, destitution and early death, made their singing even more remarkable.

For many, the onset of their husband's illness first revealed the reality of his unfaithfulness. It also revealed the possibility that they themselves were infected. Thus they were suddenly precipitated into a maelstrom of emotion and suffering, expected to care for their dying husband in homes with no running water or sanitation, knowing that their husband's death might well leave them homeless, with children to feed and keep in school. Meanwhile they were in an agony of uncertainty about their own condition, with an AIDS test an expensive potential ticket to hopelessness, and every illness being perhaps a sign of the end.

These were the people singing of the goodness of God. They gathered for mutual support and encouragement, and to be helped with ideas to generate some income for themselves and their children. As we talked they were sewing a patch-work quilt. One lady backed me to the wall to tell me about her crochet work; or rather, not so much to tell me as to sell me. Her child's education depended on it, she said. She did not need to do much persuading, it seemed the least I could do. I became the proud owner of a set of blue and white woolly table mats. I still have them. They are not much, but they are a reminder of a group of ladies who within two years were no longer with us.

Perhaps not surprisingly, they were slightly nervous of the video camera, but when the crew had packed away they asked me about my family. I produced the photos of my daughters I always have with me, and immediately the atmosphere changed and the conversation began to flow. I was asked their names. When I indicated that the older one was called Katharine, one of the younger members of the group became very animated. 'That's my name,' she told me; 'Do you think I could write to your daughter?' I thought this would be fine, and wrote down my address for her. When I arrived home ten days later, Katharine had already received her letter; in fact, she wondered why a total stranger could manage to write, when her own father did not seem capable. I asked if I could read it. It was simply stunning:

*"I am a born-again Christian and I help with the AIDS ministry of my church. I don't have AIDS but I just wanted to serve God for this time really. I'm on a six months long vacation from junior high school after O-levels, which is ending in June. My brother asked me before the vacation began whether I would like to work with the AIDS ministry. I said, 'Yes, why not?' But inside me I was honestly scared.*

*Very soon vacation began. The day before I began working, I just couldn't settle, till I got on my knees and cried before God. I told him, 'God, listen to this, whatever the case may be, you see I'm quite scared of getting involved with people with AIDS, but I have made up my mind that I'll be a sacrifice to you, O God, with my spirit broken and contrite. I asked the Holy Spirit to empower me to be the best I can to these people.*

*Right now I'm used to them. I have learned from them and they say they have learned from me. Though there are times which are bad, I'm able to cry with them, laugh with them and do things together for the glory of God.'*

I have read this out loud in churches many times since, and every time I can feel the tingle on the back of my neck: a Ugandan teenager had discovered more about what it means to follow Jesus than perhaps I ever will.

