

STRAIGHT PATHS

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"...and make straight paths for your feet..." Hebrews 12:13

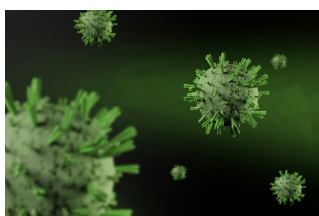
EDITORIAL

One feature of divine revelation is contrasting truths and features. The Lord Jesus is God; He is also man. God's love is wide; it is also deep. These contrasts show God's greatness, which is our desire to explore in Straight Paths. In the Jesus Series, Thomson B Thomas helps us meditate on the incarnation - the infinite second person of the Trinity being born as a tiny baby. In Apologetics, we study examples of "evolution before our eyes". Their impressive appearance contrasts with the harsh reality that they don't involve the creation of anything fundamentally new at the genetic level. In Life Issues, Eby Varghese presents the Bible's teaching on simplicity. Anthony Norris Groves, who is featured in our Missions article, applied these principles to missionary work. Sheba Chani narrates the story behind a hymn of God's tenderness which is a contrast to the holy severity of the law, which we read about in the Gospel article.

Our God is a God of the highs and lows, small and big. May our appreciation of Him increase as we read this issue of Straight Paths.

Johnny Varghese

CONTENTS



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APOLOGETICS **Science And The Bible – The Mechanism Of Evolution**

Johnny Varghese, Mumbai

Even The Most Impressive-Sounding Changes In Organisms Are Not The Kind Needed To Change Germs To People.



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JESUS SERIES **A Child Is Born**

Thomson B Thomas, Mumbai

The Birth Of Jesus Christ Is The Greatest Event In Human History



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LIFE ISSUES **The Spiritual Rhythm Of Simplicity**

Eby Varghese, Bangalore

We Are Pilgrims And Strangers On A Journey. Simplicity Is Appropriate And Beneficial.



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POEM **A Letter From Abram To Bethuel**

K.M. Phillipose, Mumbai

Heartfelt Letter From A Father To His Nephew Bethuel, Reflecting On The Marriage Of Rebekah To Isaac And The Faith And Trust In The Lord That Guided Her Journey.



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DEVOTIONAL **Two Paths Contrasted**

Straight Paths Team

The Ways Of Life In The Flesh And Spirit Have Different Outlooks And Different Consequences.



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MISSIONS **Anthony Norris Groves**

Straight Paths Team

The Missionary Who Wanted To Be Like The Apostles - Not On A Payroll Of An Organization



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HYMN STORY **In Tenderness He Sought Me**

Sheba Chani, Roorkee

A Man Overwhelmed By God's Tenderness To Him And Others Poured Out His Experience In Song



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GOSPEL **We, The Republic!**

Straight Paths Team

The Need For A Constitution Highlights The Evil Tendencies That Humans Have. God Has A Permanent Remedy.

For Private Circulation Only

STRAIGHT PATHS

SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE

The Mechanism Of Evolution

JOHNNY VARGHESE

In the previous article of this series, we examined the supposed mechanism of evolution. Mutations are random changes in DNA during reproduction. Thus, the offspring is slightly different from the parents and possibly better able to survive and pass on its distinctive traits to the next generation. Small changes, therefore, accumulate, and (so goes the narrative) that’s how germs become people! In the few examples of change in organisms we considered, we found that the mutations involved do not create any fundamentally new features - they only change the regulation of existing features. They may have their benefits but don’t tell us how reptiles could grow wings and become birds. In this article, we consider a few more examples.

Drug resistance: New strains of bacteria are appearing that are resistant to the antibiotics that would kill their ancestors. They are still bacteria, but might they become humans with millions of years of such progress? “When, after a Christmas visit, we watch grandma leave on the train to Miami, we assume that the rest of her journey will be an extrapolation of that quarter-mile,” wrote outspoken atheist and evolutionary biologist Jerry Coyne. [1]

Some bacteria are resistant to penicillin because they produce large amounts of penicillinase, an enzyme that destroys penicillin. So what role did mutations play in this? Geneticists found that mutations did not create the molecular mechanism that bacteria use to make penicillinase. Rather, a mutation damaged the gene that regulated the production of penicillinase. Such bacteria produce excessive penicillinase and thus are resistant to the antibiotic. In penicillin-free environments, they do not compete well with other bacteria (who are not spending so much resources on one task). Indeed, drug-resistant bacteria tend to flourish only in hospitals.

The active ingredient in an antibiotic is a molecule with a precise shape that attaches itself to the bacterial wall, which has precisely shaped parts for its functions (like a key fitting into a lock). Mutations can cause the bacteria to have a defective wall with a less specific shape. The antibiotic cannot attach itself and thus does not work.

Thus, the underlying phenomenon behind the development of drug resistance is the destruction of genetic information in the bacteria, not the generation of new information. These drug-resistant bacteria are becoming less sophisticated. No matter how long we wait, they won’t develop lungs and brains and become people. If the train starts in the wrong direction, it won’t reach Miami even after a long time. India can keep the Chinese at bay by destroying all the infrastructure in Arunachal Pradesh. However, destroying infrastructure will not make India a developed nation.

The Milano mutation: Some doctors have hailed it for its potential benefits to heart patients. It modifies a certain protein that makes good cholesterol, the substance that removes bad cholesterol from arteries. The modified protein is not good at its job, but the modification makes it an antioxidant. Antioxidants prevent the hardening of the arteries, which is good for avoiding heart disease. The original protein could target ‘hot spots’ in the artery, and the mutant form retains this ability. So perhaps antioxidant properties will lead to something else, and eventually apes will become humans? No. The antioxidant properties didn’t come from scratch. They came from the property of removing bad cholesterol, which is much more sophisticated than the antioxidant property (which many simple chemicals have). Thus, this mutation is a letdown in terms of information and thus is not a step in the journey from apes to humans – such a journey requires the generation of huge amounts of genetic information. It’s also worth noting that a healthy lifestyle can equal the benefits of this mutation (in preventing heart disease).

“So perhaps antioxidant properties will lead to something else, and eventually apes will become humans? No.”

Nylon-eating bacteria: In 1975, Japanese scientists discovered two species of bacteria (Flavobacterium and Pseudomonas) that can live on the waste products of nylon manufacture as their only carbon and nitrogen source. These bacteria have special enzymes that digest nylon but not natural food substances. These enzymes don’t appear to be modifications of commonly found ones. Most genes are organized in bundles called chromosomes. The genes coding for these special enzymes are all found on plasmids, strands outside chromosomes. All the genes are found on a single plasmid, pOAD2, in Flavobacterium and on two plasmids, pNAD2 and pNAD6, in Pseudomonas. In a paper titled *New Proteins Without God’s Help*, W. M. Thwaites proclaimed that this was evolution in action. He said the ability to eat nylon comes out of random changes, and if this continues, we will have more and more new skills, like flying and composing music. Creationist scientists have provided some (highly technical) arguments to show that the emergence of these enzymes is not due to the creation of new information but due to a mechanism that already exists in the genes. Here are some of the arguments without technical detail:

1. The plasmids mentioned above contain transposable elements, that is, parts that cause changes in genes when the organism is subjected to high temperature, poison, starvation, etc. This suggests that the new genes are due to changes that are based on a pre-existing mechanism for adaptation to extreme conditions.
2. Plasmids appear to be stands of genes specially designed for variation while the genes in the chromosomes remain intact. All three types of nylon-digesting genes appear on plasmids and only on plasmids. None appear on the main bacterial chromosomes of either Flavobacterium or Pseudomonas. This does not look like some random origin of these genes.
3. Random genetic changes tend to produce “stop codons”. But the genes coding for the nylon-digesting enzymes don’t have stop codons. After some technical discussion, three secular researchers remark: “These results imply that there may be some unknown mechanism behind the evolution of these genes for nylon oligomer-degrading enzymes.” [2]
4. Nylon-digesting ability in bacteria takes only nine days to appear. This suggests that the phenomenon is not random but caused by a pre-existing mechanism (if a gambler wins a lottery every nine days, he must have some link with the draw).

“Creationist scientists have provided some arguments to show that the emergence of these enzymes is not due to the creation of new information but due to a mechanism that already exists in the genes.”

Schroeter identified the *P. aeruginosa* bacterium in 1872, and it is still identifiable as such today. One hundred fifty years is a huge time period in terms of the number of bacterial generations, equivalent to tens of millions of years of human generations. According to the evolutionary story, apes and humans evolved from the same ancestor in only 6 million years. Thus, from 1872 to now, the bacteria should have changed significantly, but they haven’t. This strongly suggests that even if the new digestive ability involves the generation of information, the process is too slow to account for the variety of life we see on Earth.

Citrate-eating bacteria: In 1988, Richard Lenski from the University of Michigan started maintaining cultures of *E. Coli* (the bacteria that causes stomach infection). The environment had glucose (the bacteria’s staple diet) and citrate (which *E. Coli* find inedible) and was aerobic (open to oxygen). He observed the bacteria dying out as the glucose ran out. He would take a few survivors and put them in a new jar that had glucose and citrate. In 2008 (about 30,000 generations since the start), he reported that some of his bacteria had suddenly developed the ability to digest citrate.

“Lenski’s experiment is also yet another poke in the eye for anti-evolutionists,” said Jerry Coyne, “just what creationists say can’t happen.” [3]

Really? He should have made such dramatic claims after understanding the mechanism for citrate digestion. *E. coli* can already digest citrate in anaerobic environments (with an elaborate mechanism that evolution theory hasn’t explained). The question to be investigated was how they started doing it in aerobic environments. Zachary Blount later did his PhD research on this topic, and this is what he found:

1. A mutation damaged a gene called *arcB*, which allowed the increased production of citrate-digesting enzymes.
2. A gene coding for citrate-transporting proteins was duplicated and the duplicate copy came under a switch that remains “on” in aerobic conditions.
3. A further gene duplication meant more genes were calling for the production of citrate-transporting proteins

Thus, the citrate digesting ability was due to the duplication of already existing genes and the loss of certain controls that switched off the capability when it was not needed. It didn’t involve the generation of fundamentally new capabilities or mechanisms. Thus, it does not help the evolutionary story that fundamentally new capabilities (like sexual reproduction, the ability to speak, etc.) somehow arose due to mutations. What happened with Lenski’s bacteria can be compared to a house whose electric lights were programmed to come on at sunset. Then, the programming mechanism broke down, so the lights were on the whole day. This suited the new residents who didn’t like sunlight coming into the house and blocked it with thick curtains.

In all the examples that evolutionists cite, there is some variation in the organism that sounds impressive at first sight, but does not involve the generation of fundamentally new genes. Evolutionists have simply failed to develop a mechanism explaining how a single-celled organism evolved and became people.

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GO TO CONTENTS

A CHILD IS BORN

THOMSON B THOMAS

Prophets foretold the birth of Jesus and many other truths about his coming many centuries before it happened. Among other prophets, Isaiah prophesied about it, seven hundred years in advance. He said, “For a child is born to us, a son is given to us” (Isaiah 9:6). God revealed that He would be born as the Seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), as the Seed of Abraham (Genesis 12:3), in the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), as a descendant of king David (2 Samuel 7:12, 13), be virgin born (Isaiah 7:14), as a root out of dry land (Isaiah 53:2), and in the city of Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). These are just a few references to the prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus Christ. About the Advent, John says, “The Word became flesh” (John 1:14). Paul summarizes, “He was manifested in the flesh” (1 Timothy 3:16). This was the most significant event that ever happened in the vast human history since its beginning - God came in the flesh.

The Greatest Event in History

When the Apollo astronauts first landed on the moon in 1969, Richard Nixon, former President of the US of Watergate-scandal fame, stated excitedly, “It’s the greatest day since creation.” In response, evangelist Billy Graham, corrected him by reminding him of the birth and resurrection of Jesus. One of the American astronauts, James Irwin, an astronaut of the Apollo 15 mission, later agreed with Graham that the most remarkable event that ever happened was not man walking on the moon, but God coming and walking on earth. Yes, God taking human form, coming to earth, and living here just like other humans live is the most extraordinary event in human history.

The descent of God into human history was according to God’s eternal purposes and decrees. Paul, an early proponent of the Christian faith, refers to the promise of life in Jesus Christ (2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:2). This promise or undertaking made between the three Persons in the Trinity was announced by God in the Garden of Eden immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve in sin (Genesis 3:15). While God declared His purposes for humanity who fell in sin, Satan, the enemy of all good, incessantly tried to hinder the Saviour’s coming into this world. Though all his efforts are not evident, the barrenness of the matriarchs in the generation in which Jesus was to be born, the pollution of humanity with crass evil (which God dealt with in Noah’s time), the corruption of Israel in Canaan (of which Judah’s failure is an example) (Genesis 38), and the pollution of Israel with idolatry (for which God sent them to captivity) are all instances of these satanic attempts. While Satan corrupted the generation through which the Saviour should come to thwart God’s purposes, God had been cleansing the line and keeping it alive to fulfill His purposes. God fulfilled what He purposed in sending Jesus to the earth.

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The hymn writer, W Y Fullerton, captures the wonder of this in the following lines.

I cannot tell why He, whom angels worship
 should set His love upon the sons of men,
 or why, as Shepherd, He should seek the wanderers,
 to bring them back, they know not how or when,
 But this I know, that He was born of Mary,
 when Bethl’ em’s manger was His only home,
 and that He lived at Nazareth and laboured,
 and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world is come.

The Most-Celebrated Event

No event in the Holy Bible is more celebrated than the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Luke, an accomplished historian, presents the event in its historical context. He says, “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was the governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to His own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David” (Luke 2:1-4). The story of the birth of Jesus is true, not an old fable concocted by some religious bigots. Thus, Luke sets it in its historical context.

There were four annunciations (angelic announcements) regarding Jesus’ birth. The first was to the priest Zacharias in the Temple (Luke 1:5-25). The angel told him that his wife would have a son, John the Baptist, who would be the forerunner of Jesus Christ. In this annunciation, the angel refers to Jesus as “the Lord their God.” The second was to Mary, a young lady in Nazareth, who would become the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-38) in which the angel called Jesus the “Son of David.” The third annunciation was to Joseph in Nazareth (Matthew 1: 18-25) – to encourage him to proceed with his plan to marry Mary. Here, the angel referred to Jesus as the ‘Saviour.’ The fourth annunciation was to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-20). While the first three announcements took place before the birth of Jesus, the fourth was after Jesus’ birth. That the first intimation of the occurrence of His birth was given to the lowly shepherds when there were many important people around is a matter of great interest!

Witnessed and Extolled

Further, the nativity narratives mention seven people who saw the newborn baby Jesus. These are Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, who called Him ‘my Lord’ (Luke 1:43), Mary, the mother of Jesus who calls Him ‘Saviour’ (Luke 1:47), Zacharias, who calls Him ‘Horn of salvation’ (Luke 1:69), the Magi, who called Him ‘the King’ (Matthew 2:2,11), Simeon who called Him light (Luke 2:29-32), the shepherds who worshipped him (Luke 2:11,20) and Anna who spoke about Him to all (Luke 2:36-38). Those who have tasted Jesus as Lord, Saviour, Horn of Salvation, the King, and Light worship Him and speak about Him to all.

THE SPIRITUAL RHYTHM OF SIMPLICITY

EBY VARGHESE

In a world driven by consumption and complexity, the focus of a Christian must be to escape the trap of materialism and reorient their heart toward God. Some scholars define sin as an orientation toward the world and a misplaced trust in one's resources. Jesus Himself frequently addressed the dangers of loving money and the world in His teachings, underscoring the spiritual peril of such attachments. Yet, the pressing, practical question remains: How do we shift our orientation from the world to God? This question finds its answer in the transformative practice of the spiritual rhythm of simplicity.

The spiritual rhythm of simplicity offers a countercultural way of life that aligns with God's Word. Simplicity is not merely about decluttering possessions; it is a profoundly transformative practice that redirects the believer's focus toward God and eternal values. This rhythm, grounded in Scripture and embraced by God's people throughout history, provides a framework for living a Christ-centered life that prioritizes spiritual growth over material gain.

Biblical Foundations of Simplicity

1. Stewardship Over Ownership: The Bible consistently emphasizes that all we have belongs to God, and we are merely stewards of His resources. As 1 Timothy 6:7 reminds us, "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it." This verse underscores the fleeting nature of material possessions and calls believers to hold them with open hands. Psalm 24:1 further affirms, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it," reminding us that our role is to manage God's blessings for His glory, not selfish gain.

When we embrace this stewardship mindset, our priorities shift from hoarding to honoring God through wise and purposeful living.

2. Freedom from Materialism: Materialism is one of the greatest spiritual threats in modern society, and Jesus directly confronts this in Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters... You cannot serve both God and money." The spiritual rhythm of simplicity offers a pathway to break free from the relentless pull of consumerism. By choosing simplicity, believers escape the anxiety, comparison, and idolatry accompanying the pursuit of wealth. Jesus' warning in Luke 12:15 is sobering: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." We reorient our hearts toward God through simplicity, creating space for undivided devotion and a more peaceful, purposeful life.

3. Focus on Eternal Values: The Apostle Paul's exhortation in Colossians 3:2 calls believers to fix their hearts and minds on eternal realities: "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." Simplicity enables us to disentangle ourselves from distractions and focus on what truly matters. By prioritizing eternal values over temporal pursuits, we deepen our relationship with God and invest in what lasts forever—faith, love, and obedience. This shift from earthly preoccupations to heavenly priorities brings spiritual clarity and fosters a life of lasting significance and joy.

4. Living Generously: Simplicity fosters a spirit of generosity, a hallmark of Christ-like living. Acts 20:35 encapsulates this truth: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." When we simplify our lives, we free up resources—time, energy, and finances—to bless others and advance God's kingdom. Proverbs 11:25 affirms, "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." Living simply allows us to reflect God's heart of generosity, demonstrating His love in tangible ways. By adopting simplicity, we move from a posture of accumulation to one of abundant giving, becoming vessels of God's grace and provision to a world in need.

Historic backdrop of practicing simplicity

The book of Acts provides a vivid picture of simplicity in the early Christian community. Acts 2:44-45 describes how believers "shared everything they had" and sold possessions to meet each other's needs. This radical generosity was born from a deep conviction that their lives and resources belonged to God. The simplicity of the early church reflected their trust in God's provision and their commitment to the well-being of others. Throughout church history, monastic movements such as those led by St. Anthony of Egypt and St. Benedict emphasized simplicity as a spiritual discipline. These Christians sought to cultivate an undivided devotion to God by renouncing material wealth and living in community. For instance, the Rule of St. Benedict highlights the value of simplicity in work, prayer, and daily living, providing a model for integrating this rhythm into all aspects of life. During the Reformation, figures like Martin Luther and John Calvin reaffirmed the biblical principle of stewardship, challenging the material excesses of their time. Calvin, in particular, emphasized that God has called Christians to use their resources wisely and for the glory of God. This theological foundation has continued to inspire movements such as the Quakers, who are known for their commitment to simplicity as a reflection of their faith.

Practicing Simplicity

Living out the spiritual rhythm of simplicity requires intentionality and regular reflection. Here are a few practical ways to embody this rhythm:

1. Decluttering Life: Physical clutter often mirrors spiritual clutter. By simplifying our surroundings, we create an environment that fosters peace and focus. Hebrews 12:1 encourages believers to "throw off everything that hinders." Surely, this can include unnecessary possessions or commitments that distract us from our walk with God.

2. Mindful Consumption: Adopting a mindset of mindful consumption involves making intentional choices about how we use our resources. This practice aligns with Proverbs 30:8-9, where the writer prays, "Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread." Mindful consumption reflects a heart of dependence on God rather than material goods.

3. Embracing Contentment: Contentment is a natural fruit of simplicity. The Apostle Paul's testimony in Philippians 4:11-12 offers a powerful example: "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances." By practicing gratitude and trusting in God's provision, believers can cultivate a contented heart that finds joy in God rather than in possessions.

4. Cultivating Generosity: Simplicity frees us to live generously. Whether it's giving to those in need, volunteering time, or sharing resources, generosity is a tangible expression of our faith. As 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 reminds us, "Whoever sows generously will also reap generously... for God loves a cheerful giver."

5. Regular Reflection and Prayer: Maintaining the rhythm of simplicity requires regular reflection and prayer. As the Psalmist cries out to God in Psalm 139:23-24: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts." Inviting God to examine our priorities ensures that our lives remain aligned with His will.

The Blessings of Simplicity

The spiritual rhythm of simplicity is not a burden but a blessing. By embracing this practice, believers experience greater freedom, deeper relationships, and a clearer purpose. Simplicity liberates us from the endless cycle of striving for more. As Jesus promises in Matthew 11:28-30, His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. We find rest for our souls when we release our attachment to possessions. By focusing on what truly matters, simplicity allows us to invest in meaningful relationships with God and others. The clutter of materialism often distracts us from these connections, but simplicity restores our ability to love and serve wholeheartedly. Moreover, simplicity clarifies our purpose as followers of Christ. When we remove distractions, we can more fully engage in God's mission to love Him and our neighbors. Micah 6:8 encapsulates this purpose: "To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

In conclusion, the spiritual rhythm of simplicity is a profound and countercultural practice that invites believers to align their lives with God's priorities. Rooted in Scripture and practiced by ancient Christians, simplicity fosters a life of stewardship, contentment, generosity, and eternal focus. As we embrace this rhythm, we reflect the heart of Christ, who lived a life of perfect simplicity and trust in the Father. In doing so, we experience freedom and joy and can testify to a world longing for something greater than material wealth—a relationship with the living God.

God has called Christians to use their resources wisely and for the glory of God

POEM

A LETTER FROM ABRAM TO BETHUEL

K.M. PHILLIPOSE

Shalom! Bethuel, my dear nephew
Thanks for giving Rebekha for my son Isaac
Inside out beautiful she is
She is my daughter I didn't have

A father's grief at daughter's departure
Daughterless father can only imagine
Tears come to my eyes with emotion
Whenever I think of your grief

With my trusted servant she set out
For her he was but a stranger
Yet with trust in the Lord she came
All the way to my home in Beersheba

With the same trust in the Lord
I came out of Ur of Chaldeans
To the promised land of Canaan
By faith I obeyed to go to an unknown land

Of my future I had no notion
He promised to make me a great nation
And blessed to make me great
In me will all nations be blessed!

Of what she was going to become
Like me, Rebekha had no notion
Trust in the Lord, dear Bethuel
Mother of a nation she will become

*Affectionately your uncle Abram
Beersheba, 2076 BC*

[GO TO CONTENTS](#)

TWO PATHS CONTRASTED

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM

Those who follow Jesus Christ have a new path to walk. Paul says that the believers “do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4). These two paths, the path after the flesh and the path after the Spirit, are contrary to each other. With the new life and the new nature believers possess, they cannot walk in the old, sinful path. When a believer walks after the flesh, the old path, he walks in his old self, energized by the flesh. But he must not decide to walk on the old path; he must instead be careful to walk on the new path, the path after the Spirit. This walk is evidence that we have the new life. In this article, we contrast these two paths.

Paul contrasts these two walks, walk after the Spirit and after the flesh, in Romans 8: 5-9. There are three contrasts in these verses.

Firstly, these two paths have different outlooks. Paul says, “For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit” (v.5). Another version renders it as follows. “For those who live according to the flesh have their outlook shaped by the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their outlook shaped by the things of the Spirit” (NET). Here, the word ‘outlook’ means ‘mindset’ or ‘worldview’ – an idea or philosophy of life. Thus, people who walk in the path of the flesh have a different worldview from the believer who walks after the Spirit. Those who follow after the flesh look at the world, self, sin, or God differently from those who walk after the Spirit. For them, the world is the goal, and the self is the center. They don’t care for God or His word. But those who live after the Spirit are those who the Spirit guides. They live for the glory of God. The Word of God is their foundation for life. They are dead to themselves. The outlooks of these two groups are contrary and diverse.

Secondly, these two paths have different outcomes. Those who walk after the flesh cannot expect the destination of those who walk after the Spirit. This deduction is reasonable as the paths are in different directions. Paul makes it crystal clear. He says, “For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can it be. So then, those in the flesh cannot please God” (vv. 6, 7). The ‘carnally minded’ means those who follow after the flesh, the direction of the sinful nature. This path leads to death – more than a physical death, this indicates a fruitless and graceless life. Being rebellious to the Law of God, they are displeasing to God. James also describes such a life that leads to death (James 1:13-15). The spiritually minded are those who follow the leading of the Spirit. He leads us in the light of the Word of God. The result of submission to such guidance will be ‘life and peace’ – an abundance of life in ourselves and peace with God and our co-beings. Paths in different directions cannot lead to the same destination. While one leads to life, the other leads to death. Outcomes or destinations are different.

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But those who live after the Spirit are those who the Spirit guides. They live for the glory of God.

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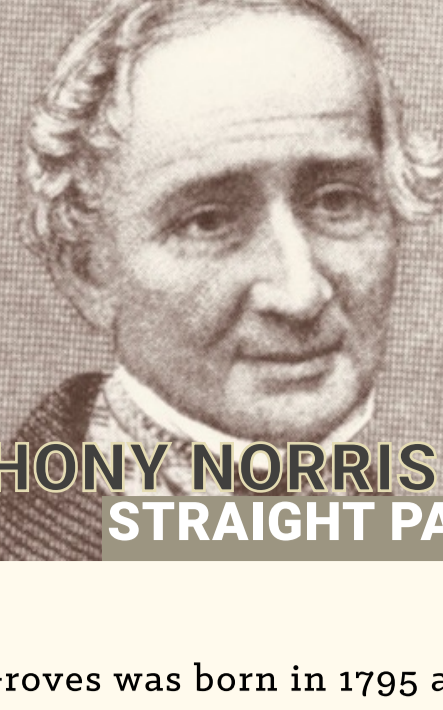
Thirdly, these two paths are different in outreach. The ‘outreach’ here means the extent of the reach of these two paths. Paul writes, “So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you” (vv. 8, 9). Paul says that the Spirit ‘dwells’ in all the believers. There is no believer without the Spirit. When a person accepts Jesus into his life as his Saviour and Lord, the Spirit makes him His permanent residence. But the ‘dwelling’ is more than the ‘indwelling.’ Indwelling is true of all believers. That indicates that the Spirit is in him. But ‘dwelling’ means more than that. It means the Holy Spirit is at home in him, pleased with his life. In other words, the person is filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). Further, it is to walk in the Spirit (Galatians 5:18). Such a life reaches out to God and He is pleased with such a life. A believer living after the flesh cannot please God - his life does not touch the heart of God.

It is good to examine our lives and see in what path we are treading. After the flesh, that is, our sinful nature, or after the Spirit? A true believer is dead to sin (Romans 6:6), that is, not obliged to the flesh. Death indicates separation. In our unregenerate state, sin was our master (Ephesians 2:1-3). We happily followed its course. But being regenerated, we are no more its slaves. We are not obligated to obey its desires. But the Holy Spirit must be the guiding factor now. We have changed direction and path. Old life and ways are past. The only passion now should be to please God. These two paths, the path of the Spirit and the path of the flesh are divergent. They are different in outlooks, outcomes, and outreach. A child of God is indebted to walk after the Spirit to please God (1 Thessalonians 4:1).

MISSIONS

ANTHONY NORRIS GROVES

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAM



Anthony Norris Groves was born in 1795 at Newton Valence, a village in Southern England [1]. After completing his schooling, he trained as a dentist and began practising. When he was 21 years old, he married his cousin Mary Thompson. He and his wife became followers of Christ and joined the Anglican Church. Anthony wanted to be ordained as a minister and then become a missionary to the Middle East with the Church Missionary Society. His theological exams were at Trinity College, Dublin. There, in 1826, he met Christians from different church backgrounds who were trying to get back to the basics of the Bible without denominational paraphernalia. They met for the breaking of bread, prayer, and Bible study. These Christians later came to be known as the Plymouth Brethren. Anthony left the Anglican Church and the Church Missionary Society, requested to be baptized, and joined the Plymouth Brethren.

Anthony became convinced from reading the New Testament that Christians should not build their treasure on Earth - that is, seek to build financial wealth or hoard large sums of money. Instead, Christians should give away their assets and lead simple lives of faith and dependence on God. "So intensely am I convinced of this truth," he wrote, "that I can with my whole heart pray for myself and all who are nearest and dearest to me that we be so circumstanced in life as to be compelled to live by faith on the divine promises day by day." [2] He gave away the fortune he and his wife had inherited for missions. He summarized these convictions in his booklet *Christian Devotedness*. He sensed God's call for him to preach the gospel overseas. So he set out in 1829 with his wife and two young sons to Baghdad. He went without being on the payroll of a missionary society - a very unusual practice then.

In Baghdad, he met Karl Gottlieb Pfander of the Basel Mission, whose book *Mizan al-Haqq* (The Balance of Truth) subsequently became a classic in Christian-Muslim apologetics. In April 1830, Groves and Pfander started a small co-ed elementary school that used colloquial Bible translations as reading texts.

Civil war soon broke out in Baghdad. The city went through siege, famine, warfare, floods, cholera, plague, and typhoid epidemics. After many delays, anxieties, and losses (including the death of his wife Mary), the coming of John Vesey Parnell, Edward Cronin, and Francis W. Newman from Dublin encouraged Groves. The team started a medical clinic and resumed their evangelistic efforts but did not see much fruit.

In 1834, Groves left Baghdad for India. He toured various missions, starting from Bombay, then southward to Sri Lanka and then northward to Calcutta.

In India, he saw many things in Western missions that made him unhappy: affluent missionaries amid poverty, foreign denominations competing for Indian converts, and missionary societies preoccupied with issues of authority, property, and finance. He suggested, "It must be obvious to all, if the native churches be not strengthened by learning to lean on the Lord instead of man, the political changes of an hour may sweep away the present form of things, so far as it depends on Europeans, and leave not a trace behind." [3]

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*He gave away the fortune he and his wife had inherited for missions. He summarized these convictions in his booklet *Christian Devotedness*.*

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He shared his convictions about returning to the Bible in church practice, evangelistic missions, and eschatology (the study of the end times) with the missionaries he met. He believed that disagreements and quarrels among Christians were due to different extra-Biblical practices that they had adopted, and if only they would shed those practices and stick to the Bible, there would be peace. He proclaimed, "My full persuasion is that, inasmuch as any one glories either in being of the Church of England, Scotland, Baptist, Independent, Wesleyan, etc., his glory is his shame.... For as the apostle said, were any of them crucified for you? The only legitimate ground for glorying is that we are among the ransomed of the Lord by his grace." [4]

He wanted missions to be based on autonomous local churches, where local believers had the freedom to meet together without foreign supervision and to preach the gospel to their own people without being trained, authorized, or paid to do so.

Groves elaborated these thoughts in his journals and especially in his "Letter on Missions to the Heathen," published in 1840, where he suggested that "the work societies endeavour to accomplish can be done better, because more scripturally, by the church herself" [5]

In 1834, he accompanied the Scottish missionary educator Alexander Duff from Calcutta to Scotland, nursing him slowly back to health. After remarriage to Harriet Baynes, and a brief recruiting campaign in Britain and Switzerland, Groves returned to Madras in 1835 with a fresh team of missionaries. He encountered opposition from other Protestant missionaries and denominations, who felt his convictions were too unconventional and impractical. Groves didn't have openings for Bible teaching in the early English churches established in India. So, he established a Christian farm settlement in Chittoor.

His vision of the church was an attempt to go back to apostolic practices and keep things simple: local congregations made of believers seeking to please Christ and encouraging others to do the same with little interest in buildings, services, finances, organization, training, or ceremony. He believed these principles would enhance Christian ministry, unity, and influence. He was against having an ordained clergy and in favor of allowing any gifted Christian man to teach the Bible and, similarly, all members of the spiritual body to exercise the spiritual gifts entrusted to them. He insisted that a true church should be neither an arm of the state nor a voluntary society with limited membership.

Anthony could not lead large numbers of Indians to Christ or establish churches. But his promising Indian disciple, John Christian Arulappan, founded an expanding network of local indigenous Christian fellowships in the Madurai district of Tamil Nadu [6].

As long as he was in England and even in India by correspondence, he influenced the Plymouth Brethren, who became an active force among the Bible-believing Christians in England during the 19th and 20th centuries. Many young Plymouth Brethren contributed to Christian Unions on University campuses, thus spreading Groves' teachings in other church circles.

Groves' ideas also influenced Hudson Taylor, a pioneering missionary to inland China, Watchman Nee, the Chinese Bible teacher and evangelist, and Bakht Singh, an Indian preacher whose ministry led to the establishment of hundreds of churches. In 1872, Groves' eldest son, Henry, became one of the founding editors of the magazine *Echoes of Service*, which facilitated prayer and financial support for Brethren missionaries from the British Isles.

Anthony Groves died in 1853 in Bristol, England, at the home of his sister Mary and her husband George Müller.

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His promising Indian disciple, John Christian Arulappan, founded an expanding network of local indigenous Christian fellowships in the Madurai district of Tamil Nadu

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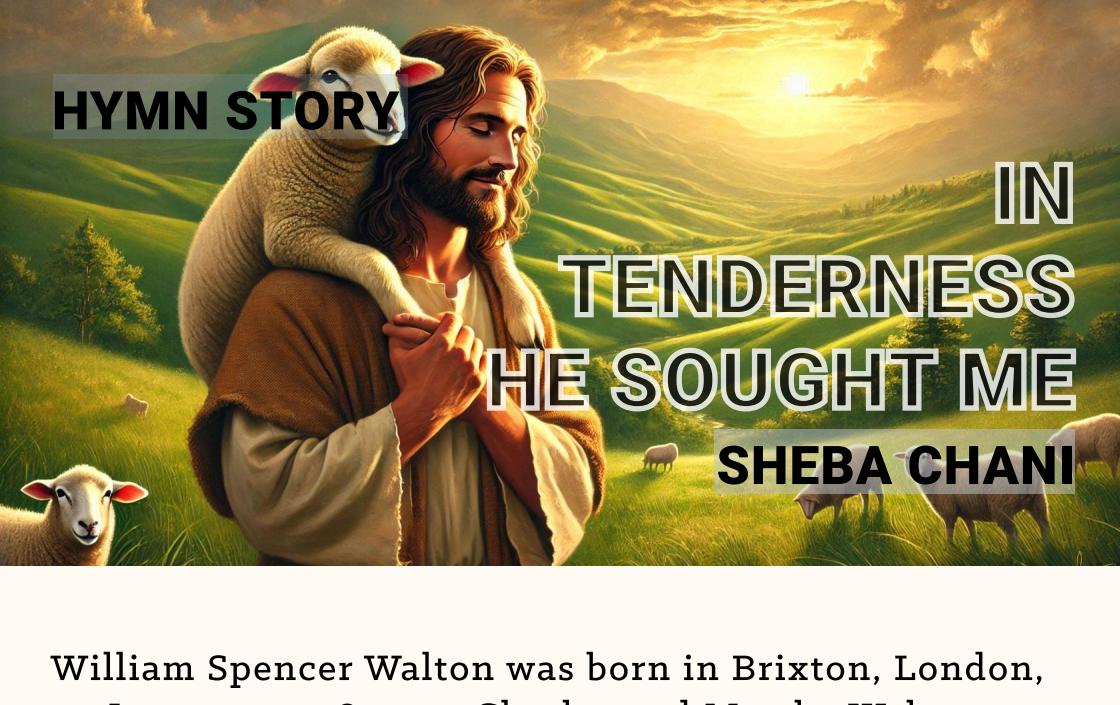
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[GO TO CONTENTS](#)



HYMN STORY

IN

TENDERNESS
HE SOUGHT ME

SHEBA CHANI

William Spencer Walton was born in Brixton, London, on January 15, 1850, to Charles and Martha Walton. Even though he was a frail child, he enjoyed a pleasant childhood until his father passed away when he was just 15 years old. Although he was a regular churchgoer, only at age 22 did he truly come to know the Lord. In his journal, he wrote of the experience, expressing regret at leading a “hypocritical and wasted life for 22 years, hoping that works would save him.”

With this change came the desire and action to share the love Christ had shown him. Compelled by the word of God, he began to share the gospel in the districts surrounding his home. At that time, he worked as a broker, but his desire to share the love of Christ with people left him longing for the day when the “fetters of business” would be broken and he could broaden his mission. However, he remained patient as he reminded himself, “Was not HE patient? And ought I not to be so too?” Walton proved faithful with what God had given him, and his mission expanded, first to the British Isles and then eventually to southern Africa through the invitation of a friend.

On his first trip to South Africa in 1888, he shared the gospel with hundreds of people and found his calling to continue his missionary work there. The varied needs of the land convinced him to start the Cape General Mission, an outpost dedicated to serving the needs of the African natives, European immigrants, and transient sailors of the region. The diverse and large area where he ministered found him preaching everywhere from churches to mud huts, gardens to military tents made of excess canvas. Walton was continually blessed to meet many who God had blessed through his previous missions, which further encouraged him to preach the evangelical message of the gospel to the farthest corners of the globe. As the mission in South Africa grew, Walton’s role changed. He spent his days traveling among churches in America and Britain to gain further support and funding for the mission in Africa. He said, “My endeavors will be to foster a higher Christian life, for if the life is right with God, all things needful will follow.”

Throughout his busy travels, he was encouraged by the faithfulness God showed through the churches. Both large and small gave generously to the mission in Africa. In 1889, Walton married Kathleen Mary Dixon, who happily entered his labours in South Africa. In ten months, God blessed them with the birth of a son. Tragically, two weeks after their son’s birth, Kathleen passed away. Later, he married Lena Gibson, and together they continued preaching the gospel in South Africa through war, famine, and plagues.

On August 22, 1906, during the Waltons’ travels in England, he developed a life-threatening abdominal infection. Four days later, Mrs. Walton felt she must tell him he would soon die. From the rich depths of abiding in Christ, he responded, “Well darling, He knows! I’m ready. I’ve been ready for thirty-four years. Bless His Name!” After spending the remainder of his days blessing his children and having messages written to his friends and missionaries he was leaving, he passed away at age 56, on August 26 1906, in Bacton, Norfolk, England.

He is credited with writing three hymns, with this one being the best known. The lyrics portray the beauty of the gospel and Christ’s saving grace. The first stanza is inspired by the parable of the Good Shepherd seeking His lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7), and the second stanza speaks of the loving actions of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10: 30-37).

*In tenderness He sought me,
Weary and sick with sin,
And on His shoulders brought me
Into His flock again.*

*While angels in His presence sang
Until the courts of heaven rang*

*He washed the bleeding sin-wounds,
And poured in oil and wine
He whispered to assure me,
“I’ve found thee, thou art Mine:”*

*I never heard a sweeter voice,
It made my aching heart rejoice.*

The chorus’s lines sum up our own humbling experience of redemption and salvation through Christ’s sacrifice.

*O the love that sought me!
O the blood that bought me!
O, the grace that brought me to the fold.
Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold*

In the third stanza, Walton describes the humiliating agony Christ suffered before his death at the hands of the Romans and his awe at the love Christ had for him from the cross.

*He pointed to the nail-prints,
For me, His blood was shed
A mocking crown so thorny,
Was placed upon His head:
Oh, the love that sought me!
Oh, the blood that bought me!
Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold,
Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold!*

The last two stanzas are an echo of the words he spoke to his wife before he passed away, where he expresses his yearning to be with Christ.

*I’m sitting in His presence,
The sunshine of His face,
While with adoring wonder
His blessings I retrace.
It seems as if eternal days
Are far too short to sound His praise
Oh, the love that sought me!
Oh, the blood that bought me!
Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold,
Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold!*

*So, while the hours are passing,
All now is perfect rest,
I’m waiting for the morning,
The brightest and the best,
When He will call us to His side,
To be with Him, His spotless bride.
Oh, the love that sought me!
Oh, the blood that bought me!
Oh, the grace that brought me to the fold,
Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold!*

This hymn beautifully displays our Shepherd’s everlasting mercy, grace, and love. It explains how Christ redeemed us by the blood that he shed when he sacrificed his life on the cross. Above all, it is a potent reminder of the humility our wretched souls should feel when we contemplate how Christ sought and saved us. The tune is called Clarendon, composed by Adoniram Judson Gordon (b. April 13, 1836; d. Feb. 2, 1895).

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My endeavors will be to foster a higher Christian life, for if the life is right with God, all things needful will follow

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GO TO CONTENTS



WE, THE REPUBLIC!

STRAIGHT PATHS TEAMS

In just a week of writing this article, the nation will celebrate its 76th Republic Day. Perhaps by the time you read this, India will have already marked this historic occasion. On this day, 75 years ago, the Indian Constitution was adopted, and the country officially became a democratic republic. Since then, India has proudly claimed to abide by the principles enshrined in this sacred document. The Constitution governs our nation, ensuring every agency and institution adheres to its guiding principles. Without it, India's human rights might have faced far darker days. But this raises a thought-provoking question: why does a nation or individual need a written book of laws to guide their conduct? Why is a written code of conduct essential?

The answer lies in the condition of the human heart. Left to our own devices, most of us are inclined to act in ways far from noble. There is a tendency to embrace actions born of selfishness, pride, and even malice. The daily news—whether in newspapers or on television—is a stark reminder of this reality. Yet, the problem is not just “them”; it is us. We are quick to point fingers, thinking, “I would never do such a thing,” but the truth is that given the right circumstances, many of us would fall into similar actions. The Bible calls this condition of the human heart “sin.”

God created mankind in His image, desiring that we follow and obey Him wholeheartedly. Yet, humanity misused its free will, choosing rebellion over obedience. This rebellion introduced sin into the world—a condition that separates us from the holy and good God who provides everything we need. Despite His abundant provision, humanity continues to rebel, choosing darkness over light. The history of Israel offers a vivid example of this pattern: God's unwavering goodness met with humanity's persistent waywardness. This brings us to the critical question: how can the human heart be transformed? How can we escape the grip of sin in our lives?

The Bible provides the answer. Jesus Christ, the Son of God and God Himself, came into this world in human form. He lived a perfect life, demonstrating what it truly means to be human as God intended. He taught about God's coming Kingdom and invited people to repent and believe. However, His radical message of truth and grace was met with hostility. An enraged crowd, unable to accept His teachings, crucified Him on a cross. Yet, this was no ordinary death—it was a sacrifice. Jesus, the sinless one, bore the punishment for humanity's sin. Three days later, He rose from the dead, conquering sin and death, and ascended to heaven. Before departing, He promised to return and take His church—those who believe in Him—to be with Him forever.

Dear reader, this message is for you. Jesus Christ came into this world not just for the masses but for you personally. His invitation is extended to you today. Will you consider repenting of your sins and placing your trust in Jesus, the Messiah, the coming King? The transformation of the human heart is possible, but it begins with a decision. Today can be the day you step into the light and experience the freedom, peace, and hope that only Jesus can provide.

[GO TO CONTENTS](#)

Straight Paths is a bimonthly e-zine which exists to edify young believers in the Lord Jesus Christ in their Christian life, to help them apply Biblical principles in their daily lives, and to equip them to share their faith with others. It also exists to serve anyone else who may have an interest in the Bible.

STRAIGHT PATHS

Editor: Johnny Varghese | Mumbai
Assistant Editor: Eby Varghese | Bhilai
Language Editor: Tom Jacob | Mumbai
Publisher: Thomson B. Thomas | Mumbai

Contact: straightpaths.emag@gmail.com