

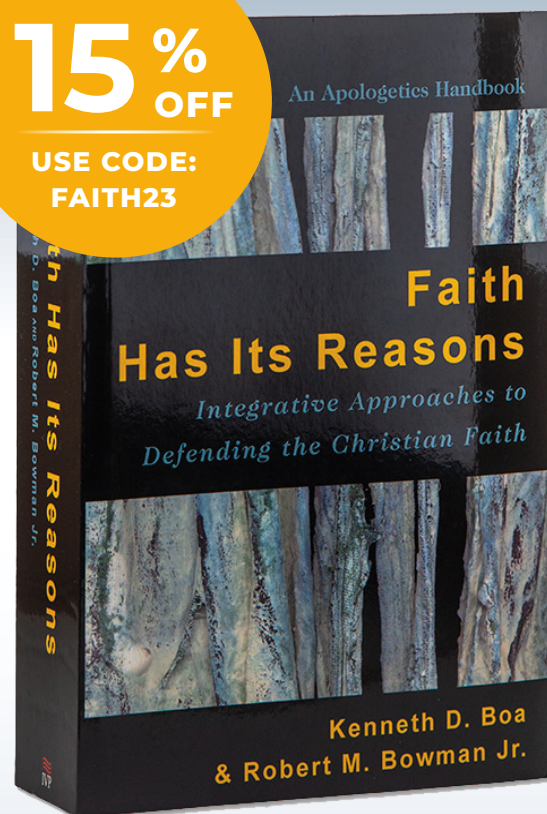
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## CAN WE BE CONFIDENT THAT CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE?

Remarkable both in its  
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Christian laypeople the tools  
to address critical questions of faith.

## THE PROMISES OF GOD

# Stop, Look, and Listen

### Read Esther 4:13-14

"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (v. 14)

People who have a non-Christian worldview tend to see most of life as "secular." They don't deny a spiritual dimension but see it only as a smaller addendum to the real business of life. That's an attitude that can, unfortunately, easily rub off onto Christians today. But we must be careful, because we never know when God might have an extraordinary work for us to do in what seems like an ordinary moment in life.

The experience of a young Jewish woman named Esther illustrates the need for God's people to remain vigilant in looking for His leading. At the end of the Israelite captivity in Babylon (which was conquered by Persia while they were there), God began returning His chosen people to their homeland. During this time when most of the Jews continued to live on foreign soil, Persia's King Xerxes chose Esther to be his queen. Haman, an official under Xerxes, hated the Jews and convinced the king that the Jewish race should be eliminated. Should his plan succeed, the Jewish nation—the children of Abraham through whom the Messiah would come—would be destroyed.

When Esther heard of this plan, she was torn. As the queen, she could possibly influence King Xerxes to spare the Jews. But by revealing her Jewish identity to Xerxes, she might lose her life along with the rest of her people. Esther's wise cousin, Mordecai, convinced her that God had called her to a royal position in Persia for just this moment in time—to save the Jews. In an Oscar®-worthy plot filled with point and counterpoint, Esther rose to the occasion. Haman's diabolical plot was exposed, he was put to death, and God's chosen people were saved.

Esther's story reminds us that there are no accidental appointments in life, no moments that are not set apart ("sacred") for God's purposes.

Believers in Jesus Christ should treat every moment of every day as a divine appointment. With spiritual senses tuned to hear and see what God is doing, we may discover that He has put us in an ordinary place for a surprising purpose. We need to stop, look, and listen for what God wants to do through us.

### GOD'S PROMISE:

When God is with you, every place  
you go becomes holy ground.

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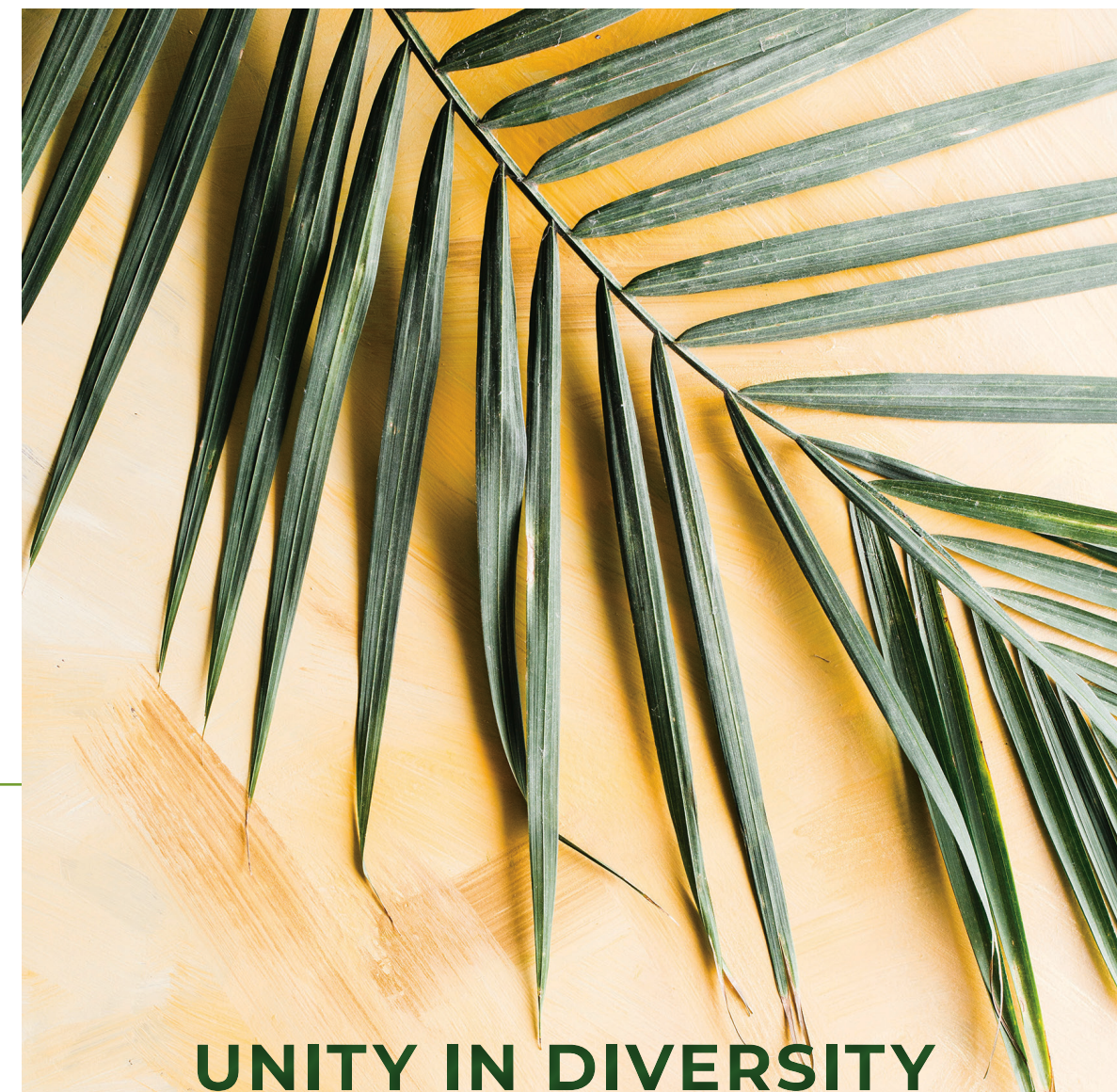


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APRIL 2023

# REFLECTIONS

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart



## UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Father, so many divisions and disputes have been generated by issues, practices, and traditions that are not part of the fundamentals of the faith. Your church is a glorious unity in diversity, but when we major on the minors, the spirit of factionalism replaces that of unity and peace. I ask for the boldness and courage to stand up and contend for the essentials of the faith, even if it means a lack of peace. I do not want to compromise the truth of the gospel for the sake of peace. But I also ask for the graciousness to demonstrate kindness and tolerance for believers who disagree with me about the non-essentials. I acknowledge that there are some things that are not clear enough in Your revelation for us to understand fully, but these are not the clearly revealed core issues of the faith. In all things, may I be loving and gracious to others.

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# WHY DOES THE RESURRECTION MATTER?

BY KEN BOA AND CAMERON MCALLISTER

“He has risen, just as He said.” (Matthew 28:6)

These seven words, the herald of the resurrection, are the core of Christianity. Apart from this truth, the Christian faith would be deceptive, and we would be lost in a world without hope (1 Corinthians 15:17–19). But because Christ is risen, we find peace with God, new life, and a hope that transcends this world.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RESURRECTION

A popular claim over the past few decades tries to argue that the resurrection is not central to Jesus’ identity. “He was merely a good moral teacher,” proponents of this view often say, “and we need only follow the example of his teaching.” However, the resurrection is the central event in human history. To see it in any other light is to misunderstand the gospel and its implications for our salvation and future resurrection in Jesus. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God who is fully God and fully man, came to die, to be buried, and to rise again. His resurrection gives us confidence in the truth of His teachings—not just about morality, but primarily about His work as the Son of God. Jesus came to be our perfect Paschal Lamb, dying for our sins as an acceptable sacrifice and bringing humanity into the heavenly places in the presence of God through His resurrection (Ephesians 2:6). The resurrection is God’s life-changing declaration that we who were dead in our trespasses have new life in Jesus Christ—just as He was raised

from the dead, so we will be (1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

The resurrection is God’s life-changing declaration that we who were dead in our trespasses have a new life in Jesus Christ.

## THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESURRECTION

The resurrection, the core of Christianity, is not some ephemeral goodwill or vague moral teaching. Rather, it confronts us with the curse of sin, the certainty of judgment, the reality of death, and individual eternal destiny. As such, it has real implications for our identity and our actions.

In Paul’s laconic rendering, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins (I Corinthians 15:17).” Building on Paul’s urgency, it’s hard to improve on novelist John Updike’s opening to his poem, “Seven Stanzas at Easter”:

Make no mistake: if He rose at all  
it was as His body;  
if the cells’ dissolution did not  
reverse, the molecules  
reknit, the amino acids rekindle,  
the Church will fall.<sup>1</sup>

We entrust our lives into Christ’s hands on the basis of his life, death, and resurrection. This colossal fact reframes our understanding of reality, allowing us to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4) in the midst of a world that is passing away.

## PAST: PEACE WITH GOD

The first implication of Christ’s resurrection is that Jesus’ death and resurrection have already bought us peace with God. His resurrection from the dead demonstrates God’s acceptance of His sacrifice in our place. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the lamb sacrificed at Passover—the Paschal Lamb (see Exodus 12). Paul links Jesus to the Paschal Lamb in 1 Corinthians 5:7. Here we find a sound basis for enduring peace. When the Son of God took on humanity, He took it on for all time as the eternal God-man. This means He has brought humanity into the heavenly places, where He is seated at the right hand of God (Hebrews 10:12). The word “seated” means His work is accomplished, once for all time. Jesus’ resurrection, then, is the reason we have moved from enmity to peace with God.

## PRESENT: A NEW IDENTITY

Second, having been reconciled to God, we now have a new identity in Jesus. Although we still struggle with sin in this present time, Jesus helps us through the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit. Sin no longer has dominion over us, which is why He calls us “saints” instead of “sinners.” We ought to live a transformed life because of this new identity.

Dallas Willard once remarked on the inevitability of a spiritual formation, punctuating the observation by saying, “*Hitler* had a spiritual formation.”<sup>2</sup>

The statement offers a profound clue about the awesome nature of human freedom. Transformation isn’t optional. For better or for worse, we really do have a hand in what we become. On a practical level, this is widely recognized: coaches and fitness trainers talk about consistency, the right mindset, and attitude. Dieticians sound much the same. Psychologists talk of neuroplasticity. Trans-humanists dream of a “post-humanity.” Your primary care physician might have some choice words about your “lifestyle.” The words “Transform Your Life” are painted across the walls of gyms and the laboring bodies filling those spaces stand as sweating examples.

In our age of convenience and technical mastery, that same zeal for technique has been transferred to human identity. If Disney movies have long promised that we can be whatever we want to be, our manifold tools seem to put that fantasy within reach. Make no mistake, there are grim aspects to this drive, as the increasingly radical experiments in human identity make plain. But there’s also an opportunity here.

If Christianity is true, you were made “a little lower than God.” As I John 3:2 puts it, “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.”

The transformability of human life points to our divine origins. From this standpoint,

all of our efforts to change our lives are tiny intimations of this fact. What if Christians pointed beyond the gym, the mindfulness, the healthy lifestyle—yes, even beyond the notion that we can rewrite the essential biological and spiritual markers of our personhood—and pointed instead to discipleship to Jesus Christ, not merely as a set of fulfilling spiritual habits, but as the road to a power that leaves all our earthly endeavors in the dust? We are made to be like Jesus here and now. Why not start today?

## FUTURE: A SURE HOPE

Finally, the resurrection means we have hope for the future. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, then we ought to despair. After all, life would be filled with sorrow and end only in death—a hopeless, meaningless prospect. As it is, Jesus has defeated death, and we will experience the fullness of that truth when He comes again in glory. His resurrection anticipates His return, when we will be perfectly conformed to His image and will spend with Him an eternity of endless joy that our limited minds can barely begin to imagine.

## THE INVITATION OF THE RESURRECTION

Because the resurrection is central to who Jesus is, we cannot take a neutral stance on what it means. There are only two viable responses—to reject or receive Jesus as the Son of God who died for our sins and rose to new life. One day, every knee will bow before Him (Philippians 2:10–11). Let us not wait to bow only then, but choose today to surrender to Jesus as Lord and Savior.

<sup>1</sup> Updike, John. “Seven Stanzas at Easter.” Available online: <https://www.poeticous.com/john-updike/seven-stanzas-at-easter>

<sup>2</sup> Willard, Dallas. *The Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NAVPRESS, 2012), 19.