



## Tragedy From Corruption & Triumph From Sacrifice

By John Elliott



*God notices how we handle tempting situations*



United Church of God  
An International Association

# Setting The Bar

by Katherine Rowland

Is the example of our lives truly in line with that of Jesus Christ? Do the little things in our lives point to God?



Does our example matter? Working with children in a school setting, one of the first lessons one learns is that elementary school children are always watching the adults who are in authority. The lesson that goes along with that is that one must consciously (and constantly) choose to be a

model of good behavior and appropriate choices. Now, some of those choices are obvious: don't run in the halls, don't push people, and don't throw books around. But there are many choices that are made every day that would seem to be much smaller in scope, and yet I have had to think to change my behavior. For example, if I walk down to the lunchroom and buy just ice cream at lunchtime, the kids don't know that I have a complete lunch waiting back in my office; they see Mrs. Rowland buying only ice cream for lunch. If they see me reading a book while I'm eating my lunch, then the lesson on book care that talks about not reading while you're eating or drinking becomes pointless. From 7:30 a.m. to

3:15 p.m. every day, I am helping to set the standard of behavior by monitoring my own behavior for correctness.

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Immanuel Kant wrote, "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law." One translation renders this, "So act that your

principle of action might safely be made a law for the whole world.” In the course of my day at school, this means that I must act as though all children were likely to view my example as the one to follow. What would it look like if everyone did as Mrs. Rowland does? Would it be a just world? Would people be kind to one another? Would it be a pleasant world? In all my actions from 7:30 to 3:15, I must be thinking of others – planning how to make the piece of the world they inhabit better because of my presence in every way I can.

This should not be much of a stretch. As Christians, we are called to the same thing. In Matthew 5:14-16, Christ said, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”

We live in a society in which bad behavior is both persuasive and pervasive. There is a general lack of awareness that there are

standards of good behavior. There are some things that we can all agree are forbidden in the Bible. But what of things that seem smaller? What about raucous parties? What about using bad language? What about how we dress and what movies we watch?

We don't like to be told what to do with our free time, with our clothing, and with our language. Does it matter, as long as we pray and care for others? Does it matter, as long as we believe in God with our whole heart? It does.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:1

, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ.” It is worth asking ourselves whether the people we meet could, in imitating us, be imitating Christ. Is our example one that sets the standard for right--and righteous--behavior?

Loving God and loving others is more than simply feeling kind and loving towards them, though that is indeed a very good start. Loving others must extend to how we act and to the example that we set. In Ephesians 5:1-4, Paul writes, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself

for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.” In verses 8-10, he continues, “Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord.”

We cannot separate our actions from our beliefs. Both must be right. Both must be continually in line with God's will and the example of Christ. Our lives have a purpose. Our every action must be brought into line with scriptural teachings so that as people watch us, they can see a glimpse of God. Our example must emulate God more and more, so that it can be seen that the principles of our actions--as laid down by God--would indeed be a safe law for the whole world.

For more information on what God expects of us, request a free copy of *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*

# Tragedy from Corruption & Triumph from Sacrifice

article by John Elliott

God notices how we handle tempting situations



“Bam, b-bam-bam-bam!” The vehicles’ wheels and axles slam as they careen around and through the endless labyrinth of potholes stretching to the horizon and beyond. Vehicles twist across the highway’s surface, bouncing through the moderate-sized holes, preferring ditches on the sides when the holes become too large. Drivers veer in every direction to avoid the holes without regard to traffic rules or which side of the road they

should be on. The unremitting beating one takes is accompanied by the staccato of “Bam, b-bam! Lurch, slam, crunch!” which must be endured if one doesn’t wish to take two days to cover the 75-kilometer stretch.

The rim of every pothole in this recently constructed highway in Africa is a bitter testament to the corruption of the officials responsible for its existence. The international funds contributed for its creation

should have provided a thick layer of asphalt atop a compacted base of gravel. Yet, most of the money ended up in private pockets leaving only enough funds for a one-inch thick veneer of which one becomes

painfully aware of at every pothole.

Such highways have crossed African nations for years, subjecting all the vehicles of commerce and transportation to inevitable disintegration at great expense to their owners. The funds once contributed for excellent roads are hidden instead in bank accounts across Europe, while appeals for more aid relentlessly continue. This is but one small example of how the corruption that serves the few, impacts the many.

## **Government should make sure its citizens are law abiding**

Laws are made for the benefit of a nation’s citizens. Authorities and the enforcers of those laws are

established for the welfare of all (Romans 13:3-7). In this region of the world, governing authorities have instituted excellent laws for the promotion and protection of all the citizens. Much of the assistance contributed has been by international taxpayers in order to solve a myriad of crises that impact the simple folk who live here.

From lighted traffic signals and hydroelectric projects to organized famine relief and strict public vehicle safety regulations, and from nationally funded district projects to strict building codes, this region has laws that are wise and honorable. Yet, people drive where they please, the food is anywhere but “here” and the ignored building codes, disabled speed monitors and missing seat belts receive blind eyes when palms get filled with cash.

Those receiving bribes turn a calloused eye to their fellow citizens, who become exposed to the very things the officials are in place to prevent. In essence, “your rulers are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves a bribe, and is pursuing rewards; they do not judge the orphan, nor does the cause of the widow come to them”

(Isaiah 1:23 , Modern King James Version throughout) .

Taxpayer funds, designated for local improvements, get squirreled away for private use even as politicians award themselves salaries equal to their counterparts in the USA. While impoverished citizens are left to eke out an uncertain existence, officials often fly first class to exotic destinations and, after landing, they helicopter to lavish hotels rather than take taxis.

In the late night, under a shroud of darkness as everyone sleeps, the last of the stores of grain in the city’s repository are spirited away in government hired trucks headed for the northern border and beyond. The unending drought of recent months has caught the neighboring country’s inhabitants without food and willing to pay high prices to get some. Sensing a profit-making opportunity, agricultural officials have quietly bought up the entire region’s grain and truck it across the border to sell at a 300% profit. The resulting scarcity they are creating in their home country is driving up grain prices by 400%, creating yet another profit-making oppor-

tunity. The same officials are said to be importing the second quality grain from South Africa, which is being resold locally at exorbitant rates caused by the grain vacuum they have created at home.

Shock and panic ensue, official inquiries are made and allegations fill the news, but no one gets caught or reprimanded as cash moves from hand to hand. Proverbs 21:14 states, “A gift in secret quiets anger; and a bribe in the bosom quiets strong wrath.”

Worldwide, citizens suffer with poor roads, dangerous transportation, unending disease, intermittent food supplies, inadequate sanitation and scant clean water to drink. Naïve international leaders see the humanitarian needs and open the wallets of their taxpayers out of a desire to help. The rich get richer and the poor largely remain ignored.

## **A personal account of corruption**

Do you ever think of what it would take to solve humanity’s problems and end all corruption? A young lady I know in Africa recently graduated from col-

lege and was promoted to the position of District Officer. Her government position is somewhat complicated by being a woman, but she has garnered the respect of the tribal chiefs and local officials that report to her. She is honest, fair and requires that all government laws must be strictly followed as God instructed Israel.

Her experiences remind me of these verses:

“You shall appoint judges and officers for yourself in all your gates which the LORD your God gives you, tribe by tribe. And they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert judgment; you shall not respect persons, nor take a gift. For a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous. You shall follow that which is altogether just, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God gives you” (Deuteronomy 16:18-20).

She reports lawbreakers’ breaches of compliance to police authorities that are sworn to investigate and prosecute them. Yet, police officials seem unable to find any evidence against those she has cited for vio-

lations. During their investigations, evidence of the infractions disappears and the offenders are allowed to continue to break the law.

Recently, the police chief himself offered her a bribe equal to three times her salary if she would withdraw a citation against a particular person. While being a person of sterling ethics, some officials discount her abilities saying she is “too dumb to take bribes.” The resulting reality is that one who tries to make a difference becomes a mere speed bump in the road of corruption. God is not okay with such situations: “He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the just, even both of them are hateful to the LORD” (Proverbs 17:15).

## **Jesus was subjected to bribery attempts**

Bribes make things easy for participants who care little about those who will unknowingly lose out because of them. Jesus was offered a very attractive and very convenient bribe. It was a private, “back-room” offer that would profit both parties for the short term. In essence, Je-

sus was offered a fast track to becoming ruler of the world, without having to be sacrificed for our sins:

“And the Devil, leading Him up into a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the Devil said to Him, All this power I will give you, and the glory of them; for it has been delivered to me. And I give it to whomever I will. Therefore if you will worship me, all shall be yours”(Luke 4:5-7).

Had Jesus taken Satan up on his offer, the Passover of 31 A.D. would have never happened and our sins could not be forgiven. Jesus did not take the bait:

“And Jesus answered and said to him, Get behind me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve'”(Luke 4:8).

Thankfully our God is devoted to the enrichment our lives, not self-promotion. His focus on serving others is resolute:

“For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, the mighty, and a terrible God, who does not respect persons nor take a bribe. He

executes justice for the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger in giving him food and clothing”(Deuteronomy 10:17-18).

## **Each of us must also be above reproach**

Likewise, His children will have nothing to do with making deals that absolve the breaking of God’s law of love:

“He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly; he who despises the gain of oppressions, who shakes his hands free from holding bribes, who stops his ear from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from seeing evil; He shall dwell on high; his refuge shall be the strongholds of rocks; bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Your eyes shall see the king in his beauty...”(Isaiah 33:15-17).

It is easy to state one’s commitment to loving and serving others as Christ does us. However, “shortcuts” to blessings inevitably get offered to the prospective children of God. What would you be willing to accept if what was offered would feather your nest and alleviate any

sacrifices in the future? This is a test that will come to everyone in time, and you should be ready for it. Remember that “gifts” that embellish one’s personal status come with strings attached.

The concept generally involves, “I’ll do something unusual for you, if you’ll do something unusual for me.” While the secret may seem a small thing and harmless to those involved, the mindset created by it is evil. The corrupted focus turns solely onto oneself. The profit realized comes at the expense of others. In contrast, those who refuse bribes are sacrificing for others, while those who accept them develop a mindset opposite God’s children. After all,

“The righteous knows the plea of the poor; the wicked cares not to know it”(Proverbs 29:7).

Consequently, God forbids His people to degenerate into such self-serving behavior and unloving deeds:

“And you shall take no bribe, for the bribe blinds the wise and perverts the words of the righteous”(Exodus 23:8).

Thankfully, our Lord, along with many faithful

saints, denied themselves opportunities that would have temporarily saved them. Instead, they sacrificed their short-term lives for the good of those they endeavor to help save in the resurrections to come:

“Women received their dead raised to life again, and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings; yes, more, of bonds and imprisonments. They were stoned, they were sawed in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented. The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith...” (Hebrews 11:35-39).

Short-term profit has a strong appeal to self-focused humans. In contrast, we are called to pursue God’s Kingdom and His righteousness with perseverance as we endure to our end. Recognize and rejoice in the fact that our Lord was so focused on our wellbeing that He con-

sidered His own circumstances second and refused the bribe offered Him. His first coming was that of a faithful liberator of those enslaved to the drudgery and death that results from

sinning. He encourages you to participate in His faithful mission to rescue humanity and to pray daily diligently for His second coming.

To learn more about Christ's sacrifice for us and the character each of us must develop, request our free booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* .

# Foundations

article by [Robert Berendt](#)

Each of us is designed to build on something that will last for eternity.



There is something special about being able to take part in building your own house or the house of another. Somehow, the construction and completion of something as usable and positive as a house leaves us all with a good feeling. I have been directly in-

involved in the construction of five houses, and the first lesson that I learned was the importance of laying the foundation properly and carefully. One needs to be aware of the soil on which the foundation rests as well as things like drainage, substance of the base used (usually concrete) and the proper strengthening of the base with metal rods. Once the foundation is secure, the house can be built with confidence. Jesus knew about foundations for houses when He remarked that rock was a lasting base on which to build (Matthew 7:24-27). But His remarks go further than house-building.

## A strong foundation stands the test of time

We lay different foundations for various things in life. A good foundation at home and in elementary school is vital for success at the higher levels of living and learning. Marriage that has been planned and approached with the desire to be strong and lasting needs a good foundation. Our faith and spiritual lives are also secure when the foundations upon which they stand are sturdy. In our spiritual life, it is God who does the shaping, forming, designing and building within each person whom He calls. He is



the master potter or master builder (Isaiah 64:8). He knows how important it is to begin properly in the development of a “temple” for His spiritual residence (1 Corinthians 3:16-17).

We humans often try to cut corners to save money, time or effort, but God knows the value of good construction that lasts forever regardless of time or effort. On the other hand, God also allows us to have a hand in the construction of our spiritual lives. He is never far away, and is always involved, but we are given instructions and directions that allow us to be part of His great work on Earth. We are to be like Mary and choose the good part – the part that satisfies a hunger for more knowledge and understanding of God’s way as Jesus taught (Luke 10:38-42).

The reason and purpose for all God has accomplished is to develop sons for His family for all eternity. The building God is concentrating on will last forever, so the foundation must be immovable and unshakable. It has been laid with the greatest care and attention to detail.

## **Jesus Christ is the true foundation on which we must build**

Jesus Christ was the main “rock” upon which the foundation was laid. The foundation, strong and solid, is to hold the rest of the temple that is to be built. Paul wrote about this in Ephesians 2:19-22. In these verses, Paul explains the wonderful truth that the Church is built upon Christ and the foundation of the apostles and prophets. It is to become a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Our part is to study, learn and then apply the teachings God has given from this foundation (1 Peter 2:1-5).

Peter goes on to explain the responsibility of each of Jesus’ followers to conduct his or her life in a way that brings honor and glory to the heavenly Father. Jesus left us a blueprint of how we are to conduct our lives. This rock is immovable and not made by human endeavor. It came directly from God, but the remainder of the responsibility in building involves us humans.

Why would God choose those He did when the foundation is so important?

Why not the most learned and capable men? God tells us He chose the foolish things that were despised so that He would shame men who think they have a “better idea” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). No human will be able to glory in His presence. He is supreme today, was yesterday and always will be.

Let us concentrate on the foundation for a moment. God chose men and women who were deeply committed to what we call the Old Testament. He chose those who obeyed His commandments (the Ten Commandments and more). The 12 disciples who became the main apostles were chosen from simple backgrounds—men who did not have their minds cluttered with politics, philosophy or greed (Acts 4:13). God did not expect them to remain as they were, but they were to continue to grow in grace and knowledge of the truth as we all are (2 Peter 3:18). Even with all the help God gave, one of the 12 became the betrayer of Jesus Christ. God does allow for free choice and wants willing followers. That one was replaced so that they all qualified to have their names inscribed on the true foundation (Revelation 21:14).

Why would God call only Jews and only men who would find it very difficult to change any beliefs they had? Peter, for example, took decades of experiences, learning and effort to finally be able to understand and accept Gentiles as equal to Israelites in God's eyes. Paul had to confront Peter about his biases and fears years after the lesson God gave in the dream Peter received (Acts 10:14; Galatians 2:11-13). God does not fault Peter, though he was wrong. God needed men who would not easily be moved from the teachings of the Old Testament. In fact, they were not to be removed at all, but they were to grasp the greater, magnified teachings that God always intended.

## God's laws define Christ's foundation

Jesus came to magnify God's law – not to annul it (Isaiah 42:21; Matthew 5:17). He did not come to change the Sabbath to Sunday, for example; He came to support the Sabbath just as He supported and magnified the other commandments in His sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:19-48).

The apostles, however, did need to leave the traditions of men behind. The Jews of Jesus' day thought they were pleasing God when they defined and regulated thousands of details about behavior that they deemed "sin." They made God's laws a burden through the heavy yoke *they* placed on people (Matthew 23:4; Galatians 5:1; Matthew 11:29-30). Jesus was not happy with the manmade rules that confined people. God's laws are supreme, and to be kept, but not as a fanatic.

Jesus expressed a whole new spiritual aspect to God's laws, which brings mankind closer to God as they learn to think as He does. He also explained that, although the Sabbath was a wonderful holy day, there were things you *could* do such as visiting the sick, or performing a good deed as He did when He healed the sick (Luke 13:15-16; John 5:8-10; 9:14). Paul wrote and cautioned each human who builds on the foundation to be careful (1 Corinthians 3:9-17).

Jesus Christ was the express image of God the Father (Hebrews 1:3). He was Jewish too. He learned the scriptures so well that by the age of 12,

He could easily discuss them with the most learned men of Jerusalem (Luke 2:47). There is a very good reason the Son of God was to be educated and trained among the Jews. There is a very good reason the foundation of the Church was to be the apostles and prophets. There is a good reason that the apostles will have their names engraved on the foundations of the heavenly Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14). God was making sure that the foundation of the Church was rock-solid.

His holy word was written in the Old Testament, taught and broadened by Jesus Christ and the apostles and written in the spiritual fullness in what we know of as the New Testament. The New does not cancel the Old; it embraces it and is in full agreement. The foundation has been laid, not by men, but by God through men. Humans are allowed to work on this foundation, but not to change it (1 Corinthians 3:10-15). It feels good to be building for eternity. This "house" will last forever and is worthy of every effort. It will cost us our lives, yet that is a small price to pay for the new life God offers (Philippians 3:8-14). Foundations are how long-lasting buildings

stand. What a privilege to be on this worksite!

To learn more about Christ's ministry and teachings, the foundation of God's Church, request

the free booklets *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* and *The Church Jesus Built*.

# The Value of God

By Hector M. Earle

Do you value God? Does He value you? How does God show how much you are worth to Him?



There is an old saying that we really don't appreciate the value of something until it is taken away from us. As we go about our busy lives, we have a tendency to underestimate the value of our Almighty Creator. In the "thick of things" of life's ups and downs, it's easy to forget the unseen power of God who supplies our every need and is an ever-present help in times of trouble. May we always resist the temptation to take for granted how much God is really worth to us.

Consider for a moment what it would be like if God had turned His back on us and abandoned sinful

mankind forever and decided not to send His Son into the world to save us from our sins. Also, imagine what would have resulted if God had hidden His truth from us, given up on His creation, and left us on our own.

Gone would be the hope of any possibility of life beyond the grave and no hope of eternal life. There would be no transcendent purpose to give meaning and purpose to our lives. We would be groping in the dark and struggling for survival with no more significance than the creatures of the animal kingdom until the day we die.

All of our accomplishments would amount to nothing in the long run. The sacrifices, the good and great things we would do would have

no lasting value, and our lives would pass into oblivion. Generations would come and go. Millions would be born; they would labor and sweat and struggle for bread and search in vain for purpose. Mankind would squabble and scold and fight for meaning until death awaits him with no hope of a resurrection, and any joy of life would be overshadowed by aching grief. His life would be only a brief passing, bounded by an eternity of nothingness before and after. In the words of the apostle Paul, "[he would largely be] of all men most miserable" (1 Corinthians 15:19 King James Version).

## **God values us now**

But thanks to our eternal Creator, He did care; so much so that He did indeed give us His only Son to die

in our place so that we can all have meaning, purpose and, yes, even eternal life (John 3:16).

God's value to us manifests itself in many other ways as well. God created us from the dust of the ground and put a spirit in us so that we can have human minds and intellect. Then, with the added gift of His Holy Spirit, He allows us to have spiritual understanding to understand His purpose and plan. He not only created us in His image, He cared enough to send along His instruction book, the Holy Scriptures to show us how to have a rewarding and fulfilling life. Our Creator gave us clear rules to live by, to protect us and show us the true way to live. Through His laws, God shows us cause and effect that produces all the good and evil in the world and freely gives us sound advice and counsel on how to make life work.

This includes wise counselling on how to have a happy marriage, sensible advice on child rearing, how to manage our finances, succeed in our jobs, and have radiant health in mind and body. Moreover, our eternal God is the source of help when

we are tired, stressed out, worried, discouraged, fearful, and encumbered by other problems of life. His Word is literally filled with hope and encouragement.

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#### **Our future value**

As mind-boggling as this is, our Heavenly Father's value goes beyond the

incredible blessing of this present life. He gives us His Holy Spirit to open our minds to comprehend spiritual things and answers the big questions of why we were born, why we are here, and where we are going. Through His Spirit, He also enables us to understand that we are heirs of wonderful promises and blessings far beyond anything we can imagine. "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ..." (Romans 8:16-17).

God, through His Son, Jesus Christ, also promises us eternal life—a life free from disease, sickness, worry, fear, and even death (Revelation 21:4).

The apostle Paul wrote about the "hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, ... [that] we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 1:2, 3:7).

Our great God, the giver and sustainer of life, first gave us physical life, as we read in the beginning of Genesis. But because of the choice the first humans

made, death resulted (Hebrews 9:27). However, unlike animals, man was created with the potential to attain spiritual eternal life, made possible by God sending His Son into the world to die for the wrong choices we made.

I could go on and mention many other benefits, like love, joy, peace, faith, and a litany of other valuable

blessings God gives us by His Holy Spirit for those who love Him and obey His commandments, but I think we get the point.

When we fully grasp that God, through His Son Jesus Christ, is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and He has created us in His own image (Genesis 1:27) for a very special purpose with the potential to attain

immortality, then life takes on a greater meaning—far greater than the empty purposeless life we would have without Him.

Aren't you glad He cared? To learn more about our creator God, request our free booklet: *Life's Ultimate Question: Does God Exist?*