

Longing for Paradise?

The advert shows a relaxed, tanned couple strolling along a sun-drenched beach. Their toned bodies reveal weeks of stress free untroubled days



lazing on clean white sand. Palm trees wave in the gentle Caribbean breeze as schools of fish dart in and out of the glassy deep sea. The resort in the background is lined with shaded tables laden with gourmet delights.

I've been there! The Caribbean is wonderful and in many respects it feels like paradise. But it is also spoiled.

Paradise is spoiled because human beings are there!

Many people dream of finding paradise in a far flung corner of the earth. But how long into the holiday does it take before the stresses and strains of human relationships begin to irritate? Loading up the car? A nightmare journey to the airport? But even once you are there mis-communication,

selfish interests and pride can prevent you enjoying the goodness of it. Yet strangely, should you decide that human relationships are so complicated that you go on your own — how long can you live with only your own company?!

There was a day when everything in the garden was rosy. God made a world that was perfect and good. The Garden of Eden gave freedom for the first couple to enjoy one another's company and spend it enjoying God and his world.¹

There was only one thing he told them not to do and — guess what — they did it! One ancient writer wrote of his frustration. Is this anything like your experience?

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing... When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.²

The Bible is clear — the problem with this world is that it is made up of human beings like me!

Paradise is spoiled because the world is out of sync with its maker!

God made a good and a wonderful world. The intricacies of the natural world stun and amaze us. But, ironically, this same world is full of so-called



'natural disasters' — such as earthquakes, floods, droughts and famine. More than that, there are wars, murders, and a host of other things which mar and spoil the world in which we live: hatred, jealousy, covetousness, adultery, greed...

God's rule book is summarised in the bit we know as "The Ten Commandments".³ These rules are designed to help us keep on track with God and run our lives smoothly — not unlike the way in which a railway is designed to run on a carefully designed track. It is a terrible tragedy when a human beings go 'off the rails' and disobey God; not unlike the recent carnage caused by an Intercity train leaving the line.

Not everyone describes the human condition quite so bluntly. But they may say: "God, I'll have you involved in my life, but not as King and Lord. You can come in on my rules and my terms — but not on yours". Yet this amounts to the same thing as outright disobedience.

The Bible calls it sin: It is 'overstepping the mark'⁴ and it is 'falling short of the perfect standards He expects'.⁵

I did it my way!

If we go back to the beginning of the Bible we discover that the couple who were made to enjoy God's paradise were kicked out of his garden. Because they said "No" to God he let them get on with their own lives. And what a mess they and we have made of it!

Here are some of the consequences of sin in our own lives:

- **Stress** is caused by our inability to control our world. We may think we have become



- masters of managing stress, but it is with us all the time. It may result in physical, mental or emotional illness.
- **Unattainable goals.** The human heart longs for perfection — but it eludes us, particularly in the arena of human relationships.

- **Unfocussed activity.** Most of us spend a considerable amount of our time wanting to be productive and creative, but in practice feeling as if we are chasing our tails.

Think of this sentence, written 2000 years ago, but speaking with remarkable clarity about the frustrations of modern life:

*For everything in the world... the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does... comes not from the Father but from the world.*⁶

The frustration we experience is partly a result of our sin-spoiled minds, bodies and emotions. But it is also part of God's judgement on this world. Arrogant men thought they could get to God by building a tower championing human achievement. God frustrated their plans. Similarly God brought frustration into this world as a punishment and a consequence of sin.⁷

The final judgement on sin is death, spiritual and physical.

The problem is, not that we are out of touch with ourselves, rather guilt and sin have put us out of sync with our maker.

If God won't let us work our way back to him — and we can't anyway because he is too perfect and we

are not — is there any hope for frustrated human beings?

Jesus is the way back

Jesus said:

*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.*⁸

This was a provocative and clear claim to divinity. He claimed that he knows fully what God is like; that he fully reveals the character and plans of God and that he provides the only way to get to God. How does this work out?

Amazing things happened when Jesus came to earth:

- Jesus showed us what human beings would be like if they hadn't been kicked out of paradise.
- Jesus was a real human being who ate, drank, washed, slept, partied and worked.
- Jesus never did, thought or said anything wrong.⁹



- Jesus stood in the place where sinful human beings deserve to be. He took the bullet for me. He went to the chair. He hung there on the cross for me.
- At the cross, Jesus made an exchange — my wrong doing for his right standing before God.¹⁰
- Jesus rose from death for he had no personal sin to hold Him in the grave.¹¹
- Jesus will stand by you on the day of judgement in the future and plead your case before the Father — if you put your trust in him now.

Paradise Regained ?

Do you long to be able to enjoy the world which God has given you? This is what he wants



and intends. Do you want to be sure that when you die you will be in paradise? You can! Actually it is remarkably simple and a life changing experience. As he hung on a cross next to Jesus, a thief

realised that Jesus didn't deserve to be there. He asked Jesus to remember him when they passed from death into the presence of God the judge. In response Jesus promised: *Today you will be with me in paradise.*¹²

If it wasn't too late for that man, nearly at the end of a thoroughly bad life, then it surely isn't too late for you.

Some things you need to acknowledge:

I've got it wrong!

Most of us go through life as if we have lost our spiritual sense of direction. In a strange town it is easy to lose our sense of direction. Though we may be convinced that we are on the right road we cannot find our destination. We may get a map out to find the correct way, but we often need to ask someone for directions and follow their instructions, even if that seems quite against the grain.

Becoming a Christian is a bit like that.

God has given us a road map — the Bible.

The Bible is important because it gives us accurate information about who he is. Most of all it tells us about his Son Jesus Christ. It may go against the grain, but you must open his road map, seek the right guidance, and get 'on track'.



God has given us other Christians to help us find the way.

Very few people begin the Christian faith by picking up God's road map and getting their sense of spiritual direction straight. Most people need a guide and a helper. Who gave you this leaflet? They can probably help you.

Turn around and go in the right direction.

This is the root meaning of the word 'repentance'.¹³ It starts with a change in our thinking: 'I'm lost', 'I need to read the map', 'I need to ask for direction'. But it results in turning your life around and going the right way. If you say 'yes' to Jesus Christ he doesn't just want you to turn around, he wants to get in the driving seat! To be quite sure that you start on the road to paradise you need to trust him

as Saviour and accept him as the Lord of your life.
This will mean new priorities for you:

- **He wants to be Lord over your diary...**

so that you can

spend time with Him and with other Christians;¹⁴

- **He wants to be Lord over your wallet...** so that the things you have and earn are used to please and honour him;¹⁵

- **He wants to be Lord over your relationships...** so that you can live according to His rule book and tell people about the new direction in which you are now travelling.¹⁶



This is but the beginning

The road to paradise is a journey which begins when you realise that you have got it wrong, said 'no' to God, and lost



your spiritual sense of direction. Sin has put you under His condemnation. You must say to God: 'You are right! I want you to be in the driving seat of my life and take me along the road that leads to paradise. Once this has happened you'll begin to experience a bit of paradise now on earth.¹⁷ But you'll also long for the paradise of heaven even more!¹⁸

A Prayer of Commitment

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you that you came to earth to show what heaven is like and offer the way back to God.

Thank you for stepping in for me and paying the penalty for my sin on the cross.

I realise that I am guilty of going my own way and deserve to be judged by God.

I realise that I need to turn around to follow God's way.

Please forgive me for living life without you in the driving seat.

Come in as my Lord and my Saviour.

Take control of my life and lead me home to paradise.

Amen.

Paradise Lost. Paradise Found.

- Reading these pages may be the last stage in responding to the claims of Jesus Christ over your life. If this is the case: great!
 - However it is also possible that you are at the early stages of your investigation into Christianity. If this is the case, you will find it helpful write for further information, or move to the next stage by reading the Bible for yourself and talking to others who have a living Christian faith.
 - You will face Jesus Christ as judge in the future, so decisions you make about him now have eternal consequences and need to be made wisely. Heaven and Hell are at stake.
 - But it is my hope that you will find true paradise in Christ before it is too late!
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1. *The account of the Garden of Eden is found in Genesis 1-2, and mankind's fall into sin is in chapter 3 of that book.*
2. *Found in the book of Romans Ch 7:18-12*
3. *These may be found in Exodus 20 and repeated in Deuteronomy 5*
4. *This is the literal meaning of the word 'transgression', see Psalm 51:1-3*
5. *This is what the word 'sin' means, see Romans 3:20-23*
6. *1 John 2:16*
7. *See Genesis 11 for the story of the Tower of Babel. Notice in Romans 8:20-22 the frustration that has resulted from God's judgement on sin.*
8. *See John 14:6, compare what is said about Jesus in John 1:1-18. The words translated 'I am' echo the Old Testament holy name for God "Yahweh".*
9. *See Hebrews 4:15*
10. *See 2 Corinthians 5:21*
11. *See Acts 2:23-24*
12. *Luke 23:42- 43*
13. *See Mark 1:15*
14. *See Hebrews 10:22-25*
15. *See 1 Corinthians 16:2*
16. *Some people find it hard to know where to start reading the Bible. Why not begin with the Gospel of John first, then maybe a letter such as Paul's to the Ephesian Church.*
17. *See 1 Timothy 6:17-19*
18. *See Revelation 2:7*

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