

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ABOUT
UNWRAPPED!

In this delightful little book John Blanchard meets and warmly welcomes believers who have freshly arrived in 'another world' that is the Christian life. He then sets out to be our tour guide of this glorious environment. Although he has lived in it for decades himself, a sense of the thrill of his own eyes being opened to the wonders of what the Lord has brought His people into, is palpable. He is no hackneyed, if knowledgeable, guide, but one whose personal excitement at being a new creation shines from every page. Building on a solid foundation of wonderfully helpful Biblical instruction, he combines memorable illustration with practical application and a sprinkling of adhesive alliteration to produce a concise but comprehensive survey of life in the Spirit. I look forward to giving this to friends who have awakened to a new life in Christ, and more than that, to walking the avenues and alleyways of the Christian worldview, mapped out for us here, with them.

Craig Dyer,
Training Director, Christianity Explored Ministries



Biblical, comprehensive and practical, this is a very welcome addition to the small number of books available for those who have recently become Christians. It is ideal to give to a new Christian, but also to be read by any believer who wants to be reminded of the great blessings and ongoing duties of the Christian life.

Rev. Jeremy Bailey,
Pastor of Bethlehem Evangelical Church, Port Talbot



Clear. Concise. Comprehensive. Unwrapped is a great starting point for new Christians, but also a lovely refresher for long-standing believers. It's packed full of foundational information and practical advice, but it will also warm your heart. A delight.

Tim Chester,
Pastor of Grace Church Boroughbridge in North
Yorkshire, and the author of over 40 books including
*Enjoying God: Experience the Power of God in Everyday
Life.*



I highly commend Dr. John Blanchard's newest book, *Unwrapped!* as a worthy addition to his previous volumes which have benefited so many because of his faithfulness to the Word of God, his appealing style and compelling clarity. This particular volume will send you, like it did me, further down the road of obedience to our Savior as it equips us to be in the world but not "of the world." It also informs us how to tell the world of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is no friend to sin but a glorious friend for sinners.

Dr. Harry L. Reeder, III
Pastor, Briarwood Presbyterian Church, Birmingham,
AL, USA

UNWRAPPED!

Living the Christian life in today's world



JOHN BLANCHARD



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INTRODUCTION

During a week of engagements on the Caribbean island of Grand Cayman I was invited to go snorkelling, something I had never done before. I jumped at the opportunity and one morning a small boat took me out into a lagoon. Putting on the diving mask, snorkel and flippers was no problem, though I did hesitate when told that I should then throw myself backwards over the side of the boat! Moments later, I could hardly believe my eyes. Everywhere I looked there were brilliantly-coloured anemones, sea stars, stingrays, tarpon, yellowtail and blue tangs, green turtles, sea urchins, coral morphs, and many other creatures I was seeing for the first time. I was in another world, and was reluctant to leave.

The Cayman experience came to mind as I began to write this book, because becoming a Christian means entering another world, not physically of course, but spiritually. The Bible even goes so far as to say that a person becoming a Christian is 'a new creation' because 'the old has passed away' and 'the new has come' (2 Corinthians 5:17). Because I have absolute confidence that the Bible is 'the living and abiding word of God' (1 Peter 1:23), I will be quoting it nearly 400

times and in Chapter 9 will explain why and how it is such an infallible guide to us as we go through life.

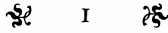
There are said to be over 4,000 different religions in today's world, and many people are confused, indifferent or unaware about what true Christianity is—and therefore about how to become a Christian and how to live as one. This is exactly why this book is being written, and why it has in mind not only those who have recently become Christians but also those who are further along in their spiritual journey.

The first six chapters of this book are largely doctrinal (explaining Christian beliefs), while those that follow are largely practical (showing how to live them out). There is an important reason for this. In his superb book *Know Your Christian Life*, the British Bible teacher Sinclair Ferguson writes, 'It is one of the facts of spiritual reality that practical Christian living is based on understanding and knowledge... how we think is one of the determining factors in how we live!'

My hope and prayer is that the following pages will give you a clear picture of some of Christianity's bedrock truths, then open a road map to guide you on your journey. It will be obvious from its size that the book does not deal in depth with any of the subjects it mentions. It is intended as a primer for those relatively new in the faith—and as a refresher course for those who have been Christians for some time—but it does pinpoint key subjects that stand out as Christianity is unwrapped.

Enjoy it!

John Blanchard, Banstead, Surrey
March 2019



THE DARK SKY

IT IS ESTIMATED that about 5,000 stars are visible to the unaided human eye from any one spot on earth, yet none can be seen in broad daylight. It is only when night falls that they can be seen in contrast to their jet-black background, and it is only when we understand people's spiritual condition before they become Christians that we get a clear picture of how brilliant Christianity really is.

SQUARE ONE

To get all of this in perspective we need to begin at the beginning. When God had completed creating the entire universe he pronounced it 'very good' (Genesis 1:31). When we realize that the One who said this is utterly perfect—'God is light, and in him is no darkness at all' (1 John 1:5)—it means that the whole universe, from the most gigantic galaxy to the tiniest organism or item, was absolutely flawless. This perfection included the first human beings; we are specifically told, 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them'

(Genesis 1:27). This does not mean that they were the same size and shape, as God has neither—‘God is spirit’ (John 4:24)—but that they were created with the unique ability to have a living relationship with him. It is impossible to imagine the nature of life on our planet at that time. Our first parents lived in perfect relationships with their Creator, with each other, with every other created being, and with the entire cosmos. There was not the slightest blemish to be found anywhere.

It is not rocket science to see that things are very different now, and the Bible pinpoints the moment when everything went disastrously wrong. Our first parents’ perfect relationships were dependent on their complete obedience to God, but at some point (we are not given any time line) they chose to rebel against him and to go their own way. When they did, ‘sin came into the world’ (Romans 5:12), with catastrophic, universal consequences. Their unique and perfect relationship with God was lost; their flawless love for each other was ruined; and for the first time they knew what it was to be guilty, alienated, ashamed and afraid. What is more, the whole of creation was thrown out of sync, with the result that it is now ‘in bondage to decay’ (Romans 8:21). Natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornados, tsunamis, floods and earthquakes give us dramatic evidence of this.

We have no space to develop this here, so we will concentrate on the effect our first parents’ rebellious disobedience continues to have on the human race. Although he was created in God’s perfect image, when the first man (Adam) began to produce children they were ‘in his own likeness, *after his image*’ (Genesis 5:3), inheriting both their father’s physical nature and his sinful spiritual nature. Adam was not only the natural head of the human race, he was also its representative head, and when he sinned he did so as humanity’s trustee. As the Bible puts it, ‘By the one man’s

disobedience the many were made sinners' (Romans 5:19). Theologians call this 'original sin' and perhaps nothing in the Bible more clearly describes our spiritual condition by nature.

HELPLESS HUMANITY

The Bible underlines man's built-in crisis in a number of vivid ways. It says we were *lost*: 'All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way' (Isaiah 53:6). It says we were *deaf*, so that we 'cannot listen' (Jeremiah 6:10) to God's voice; unless God intervenes, asking a person to understand spiritual truth is like asking someone who is stone deaf to interpret a piece of music. It says we were *blind*; that we were like those who 'grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness' (Deuteronomy 28:29) and that left to ourselves we 'cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3). This explains why you may have heard the Christian gospel many times before you finally grasped its real meaning and responded to it. Even worse, it says that we were spiritually lifeless, 'dead in our trespasses [*one of the Bible's words for sinful actions*]' (Ephesians 2:5), so unable to do anything to contribute to our salvation (more of this in the next chapter). Countless people who have no interest in the Christian faith are capable of good social behavior, such as helping those in need, but this can never solve their basic spiritual problem, as their actions are not done out of love for God or a desire to please him.

Nor can taking part in religious activity solve the problem. Even Isaiah, one of the greatest prophets in the Bible, includes himself when he confesses, 'All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment' (Isaiah 64:6). Looking back on his pre-Christian life, the apostle Paul says that he could easily have outdone anyone who boasted that they

could get right with God by their own religious efforts, yet as a Christian he could now say, 'I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord' (Philippians 3:8).

Worst of all, we were 'by nature children of wrath' (Ephesians 2:3), rightly condemned by God's perfect holiness and justice. Having acknowledged that God's judgement was 'blameless', Israel's King David confesses, 'Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me' (Psalm 51: 4-5). He was not accusing his mother (or his father for that matter) of being sinful in becoming his parents. Instead, he was acknowledging that like the rest of humanity he came from corrupted and polluted stock that stretched all the way back to Adam, which meant that he was not only a sinner by choice, but also by nature. He was saying that he inherited from all his predecessors a guilty, fallen nature and a fatal tendency to break God's law.

This cuts across most people's idea of what sin is. To some, it means gross wrongdoing such as murder, rape or child abuse. To others, it is just a religious idea or something invented by the church. But the Bible shows us the truth about sin. It describes it as a stain, a rebellion, a poison, crookedness, a burden, a storm, wandering, a sickness, a disease, a field of weeds, darkness, blindness, bondage, a debt, robbery and a curse. Sin is not trivial, but terrible, rebellion against our Maker. Sin is not superficial; it is something deep-rooted in the human heart, separating us from God and tainting everything we are and do. This means that left to ourselves we constantly and inevitably 'fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23), and are unable to fulfil the purpose for which he created us, or to do anything to put things right. That is the dark sky Christians have left behind...

WHAT HAPPENED?

AS WE HAVE NOW SEEN, everyone is guilty of breaking God's law, regardless of whether they know or admit it. God's perfect justice means we all deserve condemnation and punishment. The Bible gets straight to the point: 'For the wages of sin is death' (Romans 6:23), which is not only physical but spiritual death (eternal separation from the mercy and love of God). Only God could do something to remedy the situation—and he has!

The Bible's central message is that at the very point of man's utter helplessness, God intervened in the person of his eternal Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. One of his biblical titles is 'the last Adam' (1 Corinthians 15:45), because he came into the world to restore to man all that the first Adam lost when he fell into sin. Although Jesus was (and is) God, he became man, adding humanity to his deity. As the apostle John puts it, 'The Word [*another name for the second Person of the Trinity, see page 7 for more about this*] became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). As a man, he was subject to all the spiritual pressures we face today, yet he remained 'without sin' (Hebrews 4:15). Where Adam yielded, Jesus resisted;

where Adam fell, Jesus stood; where Adam failed, Jesus conquered.

But that was not all. Having resisted every attack of the devil, having never given way to temptation, having never once sinned, he then allowed himself to be put to death and take the place of guilty sinners by bearing in his own body and spirit God's righteous judgement against human sin. He did all of this so that people like you and me could be released from the condemnation and punishment our sin deserves and be brought into a right relationship with God. In Paul's amazing words, 'For our sake he [*God*] made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Yet even that is not the end of the story. On the third day Jesus rose from the dead, giving dynamic proof that his sacrificial death had paid in full the penalty for the sins of those in whose place he died. No wonder what God did in sending Jesus into the world is called 'the gospel,' or good news! This is the very heart of Christianity. Because of God's amazing love, guilty sinners can be declared righteous, set free from condemnation, enabled to live God-pleasing lives and be assured of spending eternity in God's glorious presence. If you are a Christian, these things are true of you —*but how did this happen?*

FROM DEATH TO LIFE

The opposite of death is life, and nothing else can take its place. Good works, religious activity, sincerity, and all the other things on which many people pin their hopes of getting right with God can no more overcome death than placing flowers on a coffin can bring a corpse back to life. Speaking to an influential religious leader, Jesus makes this crystal clear: 'Unless one is born again he cannot see the

kingdom of God' (John 3:3). Needless to say, the religious leader was baffled by what Jesus told him, and asks, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' (John 3:4). In response, Jesus explains that he was referring to a spiritual birth: 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again"' (John 3:6-7). By 'the Spirit' Jesus meant the Holy Spirit, one of the three persons in the Godhead. While God is one in essence and nature, each of the three persons in the Godhead (God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit) is distinctly and equally divine. The Holy Spirit is not one of three gods, but one of three persons in the eternal Godhead. He is often referred to as the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, but this in no way means that he is inferior to the Father or the Son. The Holy Spirit is God—sovereign, eternal and divine—and is therefore to be worshipped, glorified, honoured and obeyed.

We will see more of what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit in Chapter 14, but the important thing to grasp here is that only *God* can bring about the life-giving transformation a spiritually dead person needs.

The new birth is a supernatural work of God, a miracle that can neither be explained nor controlled. If you are a Christian, it is not because God has rewarded you for your morality, sincerity, respectability or anything else. The Bible says that 'children of God' (one of the ways it describes Christians) are those whose new, spiritual birth was 'not of blood [*natural descent*], nor of the will of the flesh [*human desire*], nor of the will of man [*human determination*], but of God' (John 1:12-13). The new birth is not a matter of turning over a new leaf, but of taking in a new life. No Christian should ever tire of being grateful to God for this miracle, which has brought them into a living relationship

with him that they could never otherwise have known. As Jesus puts it, a Christian is someone who ‘has passed from death to life’ (John 5:24).

REALITY CHECKS

We have already seen that the new birth is essential before anyone can enter the kingdom of God, but there is another qualification Jesus says is essential. When he hears people arguing over their relative importance, he tells them, ‘Unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’ (Matthew 18:3). This is usually called *conversion*, which can be recognized by two things, repentance and faith. As both words are often misunderstood, we need to look closely at them here.

Repentance is one of the most important subjects to which we could ever give attention. Jesus began his public ministry with the words, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matthew 4:17). When his disciples began preaching they ‘went out and proclaimed that people should repent’ (Mark 6:12), and in the course of his great sermon in Athens, the apostle Paul told his hearers that ‘[*God*] commands all people everywhere to repent’ (Acts 17:30). This is enough to tell us that repentance is essential and vital.

Repentance is much more than regret or self-pity. Instead, it means a radical change of mind, heart and will. It is a change of *mind*, an acceptance that God is right in condemning human sin, and that there is no point in making excuses for our failures. As David told God, ‘Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgement’ (Psalm 51:4). Repentance is also a change of *heart*. It means being truly sorry for our sin, realizing its loathsomeness in God’s sight. It is also a change of *will*, a

serious determination to live in a way that is pleasing to God, instead of one governed by our own desires or preferences. A person repenting does not suddenly become perfect, yet the change is so radical that C. S. Lewis called it going ‘full speed astern’.

Faith also involves a change of mind, heart and will. It is a change of *mind*. Not only does the Bible say that ‘without faith it is impossible to please [God]’ it adds, ‘for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him’ (Hebrews 11:6). This is obvious and needs no explanation. But faith is also a change of *heart*, as the truth about God’s love and Jesus’ sacrificial death grips the Christian in a way that goes far beyond agreeing with historical facts: ‘For with the heart one believes and is justified [*made right with God*]’ (Romans 10:10). The apostle Paul testified to this when he wrote, ‘The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me’ (Galatians 2:20). Thirdly, faith involves the *will*. It is not merely a combination of facts and feelings, it is also personal commitment. We all exercise faith every day in many different ways, such as boarding an airplane, driving a car, putting money in a bank, or eating a meal in a restaurant. The faith that makes and marks a Christian is not consent to a proposition, but commitment to a person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Repentance and faith can be seen as reality checks. They confirm for the Christian that the new birth has taken place—and the all-important thing for you to realize as you sense that they are your experience is that *they are God’s gifts to you*, not things you have created for yourself. On what is often called the Christian church’s birthday, the apostle Peter preached that after Jesus had died, God raised him from the dead and ‘exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Saviour, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins’

(Acts 5:31). Later, after he had shared the gospel with those who were not Israelites, he reported to the church leaders in Jerusalem that ‘God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us’ (Acts 11:17). Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is also a gift; Paul told the church at Ephesus, ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast’ (Ephesians 2:8-9).