

The end came quickly, violently.

All Our Eggs in One Basket



One moment everything was normal, and, in a lightning-like flash, everything was dead. That which had been solid, reliable, trustworthy for four years was now, in an instant, gone.

Yes, my hard drive was dead.

Irretrievably deceased.

MY LONG, PLAINTIVE WAIL echoed through the rooms of the house, out the wood screen door, out over the dwindling pond and through the dense brush and leaf-laden trees of the mid-summer woods. It surely was heard just four miles down a curving gravel road, well into the middle-class homes of Winterset, and throughout the length and breadth of Madison County. Perhaps it was even heard as far away as Redmond, Washington, but if Mr. Gates heard it he missed the opportunity to ring me up, inquiring after my pain.

But then, it wasn't the fault of Microsoft® anyway. No, it was a breakdown of hardware, all the way. My primary hard drive just decided it was time for it to give up the ghost.

After the initial panic—the suffocating restriction of the throat muscles, the lungs gasping frantically for air—there comes a brief period of resignation—a respite of almost philosophical reflection as one considers the higher meaning, the cosmic importance of such a life-changing event.

Then the panic returns. At almost binary speed the mind sifts through the dusty catalogue of every piece of software, every file that had taken up residence on that stack of spinning plates. Some are easy: the operating system, the larger applications used every day to conduct business, to create the product of a calling. But then there are those smaller, more ephemeral hit-and-miss programs that are so integrated into the computer's work that they have become invisible—yet essential. Many of these have now evaporated into the ether, forgotten and never to return, launched toward software heaven and that great hard drive platter in the sky.

Diversification

The standard advice to anyone investing in the stock market is that they spread out their funds across a varied spectrum of different kinds of investments. Some in domestic, some in foreign stocks. Some in high-risk, some in low-risk. Some in traditional stocks, some in Mutual Funds. With this strategy the individual minimizes risk, since rarely do all types of investments fail at the same time.

A similar strategy can apply to managing programs and files on a computer. While my recent hard drive death was a thundering, time-consuming inconvenience, requiring the reinstallation of all critical software, I lost few actual data files. Almost all of my documents resided on a separate physical drive, on removable media such as CDs, or on a web server in Alabama. To restore my work (and routine) I only had to reinstall the respective programs; the data files created by them remained safe and secure where they had been all along.

In things regarding religion and spirituality, many people today subscribe to a similar form of diversification. Like the ancient Romans, their philosophy is, "The more the merrier!" If one "god" doesn't meet all their needs, they will just add in another to the mix. If they are unsure as to the soundness and scope of one faith, they will just subscribe to another to cover all their bases. Better safe than sorry, right?

But what is good strategy for investments and computer file integrity is not at all good strategy for matters of faith.

Conflicting Paths

My salvation when my hard drive died was that I had the essential files elsewhere. Most of the pieces I would need to continue working were spread out in different places. I was protected by putting my faith in more than one means of redemption.

But when it comes to my *spiritual* faith, my salvation is found in one—and only one—place.

[I]f you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for "Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

(Romans 10:9-13)

Diversification with computer files, stocks and bonds is additive; it is a healthy and common-sense form of insurance. Diversification

in matters of faith, however, is subtractive: Every element of faith in a false god *diminishes* faith in the true God. What happens to one's belief in the authority of Christ when one subscribes as well to another belief that declares He is *not* God, but was just a kind, well-meaning prophet? What happens to faith in a pleasant and rewarding eternity when a multiplicity of beliefs contradict each other on that rather important matter? And what happens to the integrity of the way toward that eternity when different paths slice and dice each other at will?

The answer in matters of faith is not diversity, but informed allegiance to one path.

Jesus heard that they had put him out, and finding him, He said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "Who is He, Lord, that I may believe in Him?" Jesus said to him, "You have both seen Him, and He is the one who is talking with you." And he said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped Him. And Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, so that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind."

(John 9:35-39)

Faith in anything and everything is no faith at all. True faith says, "*This* is what I believe, and I stake my very life on it."

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Your bid—for God or no God, for a good God or the Cosmic Sadist, for eternal life or nonentity—will not be serious if nothing much is staked on it. And you will never discover how serious it was until the stakes are raised horribly high; until you find that you are playing not for counters or for sixpences but for every penny you have in the world.

(C.S. Lewis)