

A MAGAZINE TO ENCOURAGE THE STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES,
THE PRACTICE OF NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH PRINCIPLES
AND INTEREST IN GOSPEL WORK

Precious SEED

INTERNATIONAL



‘Wherefore seeing we also
are compassed about with
so great a cloud of witnesses,
let us lay aside every weight,
and the sin which doth so
easily beset us, and let us
run with patience the race
that is set before us’,
Hebrews 12.1.

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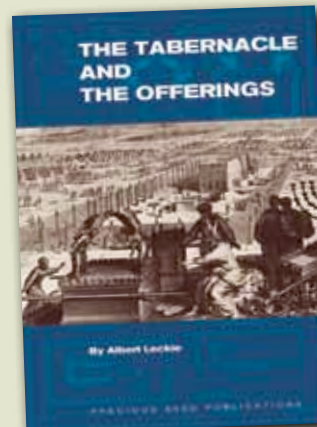
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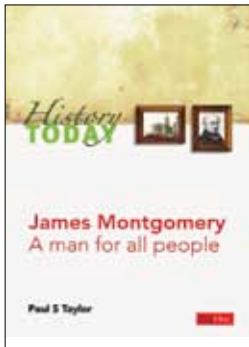
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Book Reviews

By **JOHN BENNETT** and **JOHN SCARBROOK**

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History Today - James Montgomery Paul S. Taylor

Paperback, 134pp. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ, UK. Price £7.00. ISBN 978-1-84625-209-9.

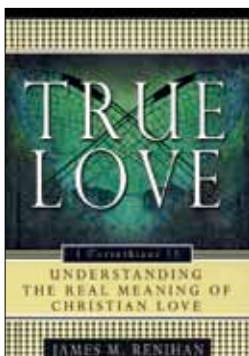
James Montgomery was the author of some 400 hymns, among the best known are: 'Hail to the Lord's Anointed'; 'Forever with the Lord'; and 'According to thy gracious word, in meek humility'. In the preface to this book the author indicates that, apart from a seven-volume work by John Holland and James Everett published in 1854, very little has been written about the life of this hymn-writer and adds, 'This book seeks to rectify that omission and to present a popular but serious evaluation of Montgomery's varied life'.

James Montgomery was born in Ayrshire in 1771, his father a minister with the Moravian Brethren. In 1777 James was sent to a Moravian settlement in Fulneck, Yorkshire, for his education. While in Fulneck, he developed a love for music and poetry, but was obliged to leave when aged sixteen on account of his indolence; he was described by his tutors as 'talented but difficult'. James determined to make his own way in the world and for the next fifteen years, as to his spiritual condition, he would later recollect in a poem that he was akin to 'a star from heaven' that had gone astray. During those years he went to Sheffield, found employment with the publisher of a local newspaper, the *Sheffield Register*, quickly rising to become editor and co-owner of it.

After a period of depression and now 31 years old, he began to attend a Bible Study Group which resulted in a renewal of spiritual interests and restoration to the Lord. In subsequent years Montgomery was linked with many educational and missionary societies, as well as occupying prominent administrative posts in the city of Sheffield. In his busy life he championed a number of social issues such as the abolition of slavery and the plight of 'the climbing boys' employed in cleaning chimneys. He was involved in the editing and publishing of a number of books on hymns as well as several volumes of his own poetry and a collection of his own hymns, those hymns testifying to his love for Christ and for His word.

James Montgomery has been described as standing alongside Wesley and Watts as one of our greatest hymn writers and in this book Paul Taylor has given a helpful, interesting and comprehensive biography of this outstanding Christian.

[Our thanks to Richard Catchpole, South Norwood, England, for this review]



True Love - Understanding the real meaning of Christian love

James M. Renihan

Paperback, 144pp., Published by Evangelical Press, Faverdale North, Darlington, DL3 0PH, UK. Price: £8.99. ISBN 978-0-852347-13-3.

This book will speak to the conscience. JAMES RENIHAN has not set out to expound 1 Corinthians 13, but rather to describe the essential meaning of its central message, and to challenge his readers to live out that meaning in the world of today. He is well aware that it is no easy task to write acceptably on the subject of love, and has approached his task with commendable humility: 'We recognise how far short of the standard we come . . . As an author, I have to struggle with my failure to achieve the touchstone of which I write'. His readers will surely echo the same sentiments.

The author is professor of Historical Theology at a Reformed Baptist Seminary, and is an elder in a Baptist church; he has had extensive experience in a pastoral capacity. In the preface he is quite explicit in stating that he has deliberately avoided important questions which an exposition of this chapter might have to address, so that he can concentrate on his main theme, which is to encourage his readers to understand the true meaning of Christian love, and to face up honestly to the responsibility which such understanding brings with it. The first three chapters give the necessary context for this work. In these he emphasizes that love is law – a command, which can only be discharged in the energy of the Holy Spirit. He stresses the centrality of love, and exposes the way its real meaning is often obscured by sentimentality and self-obsession. In chapters 4-12 he leads his readers through the fifteen verbs which Paul uses to define love, emphasizing that all these words have to do with our deeds. He gets behind the familiar words, with which we are all too often so comfortable that they rarely touch the conscience. His style is simple yet direct and searching, and refreshingly honest. Readers who are prepared to approach this book in the same spirit and give time to meditate on its contents will benefit from it.

[Our thanks to Ed Hotchin, Hucknall, England, for this review]



Exemplary Spiritual Leadership J. Wragg

Paperback, 154pp, Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ, UK. £7.00. ISBN 978-1-84625-200-6.

There is much here that is helpful. There is good use of headings and sub-headings as different aspects are dealt with: in the chapter 'Leaders that God resists' we have 'the begrudging leader', 'the greedy leader', 'the belligerent leader', and the last point is further developed – 'intolerance of others', 'arrogance and joylessness', etc. There are frequent references to scripture and also well-chosen quotations from writers.

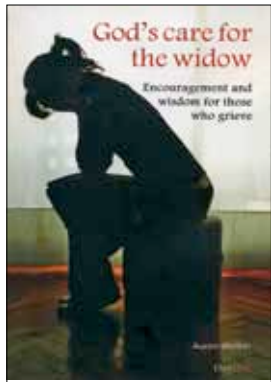
The writer is a pastor-teacher at a church in Florida; he refers to the time 'when I accepted the call to be pastor of my own flock'. In dealing with the development of leadership he sets forth what he does as the minister with elders in his local church; 'I will sometimes bring an individual alongside as I fulfil a leadership duty . . . to see how he handles it'; 'When I survey the men of

our church for leadership potential I look for someone who . . . '.

He identifies areas of practical ministry that need to be addressed by church elders; these are well chosen. Likewise, the points identified for a leader are well chosen: for example, faithfulness in little things; and patience with inadequacies in others. Each point is developed in a paragraph.

The content is good. However, whether potential readers will appreciate this book may well depend less on *what* is written and more on *how* it is written. WRAGG uses personal experience for examples and writes in a semi-narrative way. He uses anecdotal illustrations usually from his own experience; in dealing with the matter of a godly life, he narrates what happened one day two years ago when he was in a bookstore – 'excitedly I picked it up (a book)'; in dealing with perseverance under pressure, he begins with the time when he was at Boot Camp in the USAF. There is the use of bullet points, rhetorical questions (three, one after the other, on occasions), and colloquialisms ('Ah, money!'; 'remember, we're all sheep!'; 'Let's face it'). The book is written to a large extent with a speaking voice, a 'pacy' style, and some readers are going to be more comfortable with it than others.

[Our thanks to Bryan Charles, Appledore, Devon, England, for this review]



God's Care for the Widow Austin Walker

Paperback, 128pp, Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ, UK. Price £5.00. ISBN 978-1-84625-199-3.

For over thirty years the author has been a pastor at a Reformed Baptist Church in Crawley and it is from this background that he writes. In his role as a pastor he has been involved for many years in trying to bring a measure of comfort to the bereaved, and it is that experience which has prompted and equipped him to address this subject. Moreover, he has observed closely two women, one of whom was his mother-in-law, whose experience of coping with the loss of their husbands taught him much and left a deep impression on him. He writes from a strong conviction that, true to His promises, God will care for the widow; and that it is from the scriptures that she will draw strength and comfort.

The book consists of eighteen short chapters, together with endorsements, introduction, endnotes and scripture references. Each chapter begins with a quotation from Scripture, and from these quotations the author draws lessons and adds counsel, encouragement, and practical advice. Although the book is directed towards widows who are believers, the author does not miss an opportunity to confront unbelieving widows with the challenge of the gospel. He is well aware of the pitfalls which may be encountered when writing on such a subject as this. 'Singing songs to a heavy heart' calls for sincerity, sympathy, and tact; these qualities, together with the author's earnestness, are clearly revealed in this work. It is a book in which widowers also may find help. Additionally, the wider church will be reminded of its duty and opportunity to minister to a needy and often neglected group. While, because of changes in state support, financial pressures on widows may not be as acute as they once were, an ageing population means that the problem of loneliness is an increasing one. Our involvement in preaching and teaching should not allow us to neglect what James describes as the mark of 'pure religion and undefiled'.

[Our thanks to Ed Hotchin, Hucknall, Nottingham, England for this review]



You Shall Go Out With Joy Robert Muir

Paperback, 136pp. Published by John Ritchie Ltd., 40 Beansburn, Kilmarnock, Scotland, KA3 1RH. £6.99. ISBN 978-1-907731-11-2.

This delightful book charts the missionary work of Robert and Margaret Muir as they sought to serve the Lord in Congo and Zambia. As Bert Cargill states in the foreword, 'At a time when many people taking early retirement would be looking for an easier option, Robert Muir effectively took on a new and more demanding task'.

From the start of their work in Congo in 1995 the book deals with their flight from that country because of a military coup. The reality of their experiences at this time is difficult to imagine as they negotiated road blocks and were ambushed and robbed. However, what shines through the whole book is their love for the Lord and the people they were trying to reach with the gospel.

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'For if ye do these things ye shall never fall', 2 Pet. 1. 10.

It is instructive that Peter should write these words. He was someone who knew, from personal experience, what it was to fall. He had made rash comments and claims, only to find that which he had claimed to be absent in the hour of crisis. Who could forget Peter's declaration, 'If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise', Mark 14. 31? Alas, Peter had not just denied the Lord once, but three times, and that with oaths and curses, v. 71. For many, that would have been the last of Peter. Such a spectacular fall would have meant that, in their minds, his useful spiritual life was finished.

As we read the words of our text, it is obvious that Peter was restored. His fall was not as irrevocable as some might have thought. That is why he now writes, 'Ye shall never fall'. We all fail. As long as we are still in this mortal body we are conscious of the propensity to sin. However, we can take courage from Peter, failure need not be final. Confession can bring forgiveness and cleansing.

In addition to the responsibility that lies with the individual who fails, there is also the need of a specific ministry. Paul wrote to the Galatians, 'If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness', 6. 1. Those that, like Peter, have experienced failure may be equipped for such a task. They have been in that same position but, in meekness, it is hoped that they have moved on and grown in Christ.

But there is an aspect of ministry here which Peter needed and the Lord provided. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, 'Ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow', 2 Cor. 2. 7. This is true restoration. The forgiveness espoused is not theoretical but genuinely conveyed in the comfort that is demonstrated. Where there is true repentance there is deep sorrow. How important that where there is true forgiveness there should be genuine comfort to restore the believer who has fallen!

Commencing this new year of the magazine, we are encouraged to see material from authors that continue to supply us with food for the people of God. It is also good to see new writers prepared to support the work, providing heart-warming and challenging ministry. The new expository series for the centre pages continues with an exposition of the first chapter of First John. There is also very practical and timely ministry on developing the spiritual potential of a new generation as well as a short article on the exacting nature of the 'school of pain'. May the Lord be pleased to bless the magazine to His people and use it for the furtherance of His work and to His glory!

JOHN BENNETT

Ministry Articles Editor



It is evident from the word of God that there is a time gap after the rapture of the saints of this present dispensation. The place that Israel will have in that period is also defined in the word of God.

Israel in the interval between the Rapture and the Tribulation

By **NORMAN MELLISH** Stoke-on-Trent, England

A Return to the Land

The first thing that is necessary is that, as a nation, the Jews must once again be in possession of the land of Israel before the events that are to mark the Tribulation can begin. It is common knowledge that they were dispossessed of the land in AD 70 when the invading forces of Titus ransacked the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the temple and drove the people among the nations around them. This was in accord with the prophecy of Hosea chapter 3 verse 4, 'For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim'.

During the long absence from the land they have been without the status of a nation but thankfully they did not turn to idolatry, or lose their identity as a people in the 1900 years of exile. Many prophetic teachers taught that the return of the nation to the land would only be at the time of the fulfilment of the feast of trumpets when the Lord will send His angels to gather His elect from the four corners of the earth at His return in glory to establish His kingdom, Mark. 13. 27. However, it is quite evident that there must be a gathering in unbelief and not to kingdom glory, to establish them once again in the land so that the events of the Tribulation can take place as recorded in the Olivet discourse.

It was a monumental event that occurred on 14 May 1948 when a mandate by the United Nations granted the Jews a place again in Israel to re-establish a homeland for its people. From that time onwards the Arab nations have sought to drive them from the land of their

heritage, and, in spite of being there in unbelief, the Lord has preserved them, against overwhelming odds, to set in order events that will shortly take place when the rapture of the saints occurs.

The Rebuilding the Temple and Restoring of the Sacrifices

It must be in this period of time that there will be a movement to restore once again the worship of Jehovah

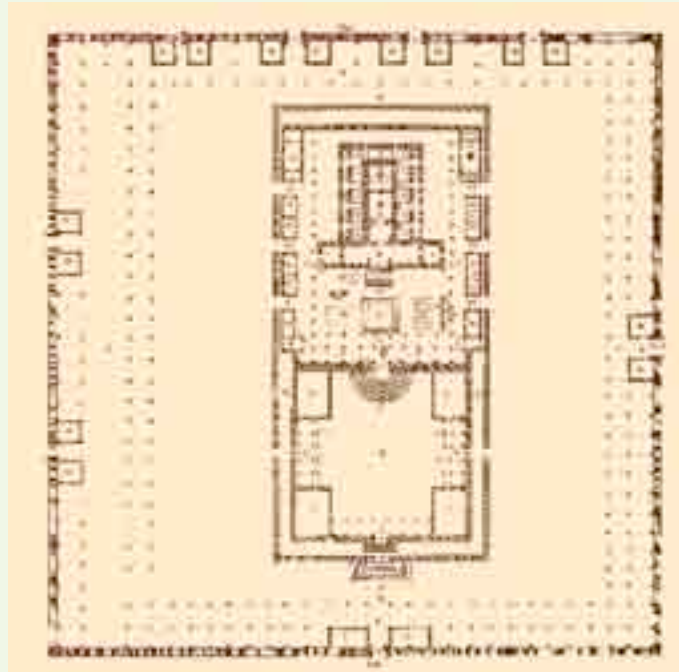
fact of the temple of God, the altar, and them that worship therein. That sacrifices are being offered is seen in Daniel chapter 9 verse 27, when one of the first actions of the Man of Sin will be to 'cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease'. The same is said in chapter 11 verse 31, 'And shall take away the daily sacrifice, and they shall place the abomination that maketh desolate'. From these, and other scriptures, it is clear that the present desire of those in Israel to see the temple rebuilt and for the sacrifices to be restored will one day be put into effect, for the Man of Sin cannot abolish what does not exist. This temple is not the temple that the Lord will build in which He will be glorified during the days of kingdom glory.

It is also apparent that not all within the nation will have a desire to serve the Lord, for again the book of Daniel would testify to those who 'forsake the holy covenant' and 'do wickedly against the holy covenant', who will be 'corrupted by flatteries', Dan. 11. 30-32.

The Lord Himself also speaks of a faithful remnant that will be found in those days who are told to 'flee' for their own preservation, Matt. 24. 16-22.

They will Recognize the Military Power of the Man of Sin

Even in the period after the Rapture of the church and before the Tribulation begins it is evident that there will be a time of national disturbance among the nations. The Lord Himself spoke of wars and rumours of wars, of civil war, and also of military conflict as nation rises against nation. During this time, and before the Man of Sin is revealed, there will be on-going



as it had been in former days. There are a number of prophecies that relate to the worship that will be in progress when the Man of Sin arises to dominate the minds of men and establish himself as God. It is apparent that the temple will be built in close connection with the former temples that once graced the land in Jerusalem, for the prophecy of Matthew chapter 24 verse 15 makes a distinction between the various parts of the temple, speaking of the 'holy place' indicating that there were the other sections of it. The book of Revelation chapter 11 also refers to the worship of the Jews when the Tribulation begins, as it records the

between Tribulation

conflict between what is now Iraq and Egypt, as recorded in the book of Daniel chapter 11. For the struggles for power between the King of the North, the ancient Babylon, and the King of the south, Egypt, are recorded for us with a view to seeing how the Antichrist, the Man of Sin, comes to power. Many have taken these verses to be historical, recording events that have already taken place in the inter-testamental period. Yet such expositors also proclaim that this period is the time of the silence of God when no revelation was made known. We cannot have it both ways! Either the Lord did reveal what would occur in that time period or these verses must point to future events.

If, as we believe, the prophecies of Daniel chapter 11 are still future, and we do have this great conflict between the nations referred to, then we realize that Israel is sandwiched between them and will feel the weight of the struggles that will ensue during that period of battles for supremacy. It is as a result of this warfare that the Man of Sin comes to political ascendancy. There seems to be at least three kings in association with what is presently Iraq but will represent what is the ancient people of Babylon. The first King of the North, of verse 16, will stand in the glorious land, evidently Israel, which by his hand will be consumed.

Perhaps here we have the fulfilment of the prophecy of chapter 9 verse 26, when 'the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary'. Before the Tribulation begins, Israel will be subject to attack from the ongoing wars. This king will come to nothing, for chapter 11 verse 19 states, 'He shall turn his face to the fort of his own land; but he shall stumble and fall, and not be found'. A raiser

of taxes will rise in his place who 'within a few days shall be destroyed neither in anger nor in battle', v. 20. It is at this point that the Man of Sin comes to the fore, perhaps his first act is to dispose of the king in the previous verse. This king, seen at first as a vile person to whom they will not give the honour of the kingdom, moves seemingly peaceably and with flatteries, until he ingratiates himself into the hearts and minds of the people. Such is his ability to establish his kingdom and to destroy any opposition that those responsible for the well-being of the nation of Israel will turn to him for military protection.

The Raising of the Covenant

There are a number of things that must take place before the Tribulation can actually begin. The first is the Rapture of the church. We are not appointed to wrath, 1 Thess. 5. 9, nor will He bring us into it but will 'keep thee from the

will not yet be manifested as the first beast of Revelation 13. When he does come to prominence, the nation of Israel will turn to him for protection for the book of Daniel speaks of a league made with him, 11. 23. This would refer to the covenant spoken of in chapter 9 verse 27. It is evident that this covenant is made at a time prior to what is recorded in chapter 9, for there the covenant is confirmed. The covenant is made before the Tribulation begins and when the covenant is confirmed this is the commencement of the Tribulation period. This would seem to indicate that the Man of Sin will be called in to protect the people of Israel when they feel that they are in need of his help. There is no thought of this covenant being broken, as so many teach, it is rather some form of peace treaty to give assistance to Israel for their support. What is indicated is that rather than break a covenant he usurps authority in association with the prince of the covenant, who is the religious leader in Israel, 11. 22, to set himself up as God within the temple.

The Reserving of the Elect

There will be a very definite number of the Jewish nation from all around the globe who will be marked out for preservation from among the twelve tribes. They will have the seal of

God placed in their foreheads before the Tribulation begins. God knows who these are and will send four of His angels to the four corners of the earth to hold back the storm of judgement before it comes upon the world, so as to mark out this elect company, Rev. 7. 1-8. We are not told that they have a ministry during the Tribulation, though many make them the preachers of the kingdom during that period. However, it is simply that the Lord will reserve to Himself from among the Jews those who will be protected by a divine hand.

NORMAN MELLISH went into full-time service for the Lord, commended by the Wythenshawe assembly in Manchester, England. He has authored books, on Revelation, Philippians, and Daniel.



hour of temptation (trial) which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth', Rev. 3. 10. The Lord has taken our judgement at the cross and for those who believe there is now no condemnation, according to Romans chapter 8 verse 1. The Tribulation period is a 'day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess . . . I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung', Zeph. 1. 15-17. The Lord will not judge His own with the world.

The Antichrist must also come to some form of authority, though he



Teaching and Guiding a Risi

Part 1: THE SPIRITUAL BALANCE

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of discipling others is knowing how much time should be committed to the spiritually lethargic. Not every Christian matures as he or she ought to. However, every true child of God will grow and bear fruit to some extent; this is evidence of salvation, Jas. 2. 17. There are various possible reasons for a lack of maturity. The sluggish believer may not be spending time in the word of God as he or she ought, due to a preoccupation with temporal things and activities. Others may be grieving the Holy Spirit through unconfessed sin. Of course, the problem might also lie with the mentor; that is, his or her instruction may be incomplete or inaccurate, or his or her example may be inconsistent. A lack of growth in a believer may well be caused by any combination of the above reasons. Yet other professing believers may not be truly saved at all; these are like the stony and the thorny ground upon which the gospel seed fell in the parable the Lord told, Matt. 13. 1-8. Their outward presentation looks good for a while, but, because there was never any root of faith in their hearts, in time they are shown to be counterfeits.

It is my opinion that those who discontinue discipleship training often do so because they were never truly born again. The shepherd does not want to be guilty of entertaining goats while neglecting the Lord's sheep, so it is important to assess the spiritual state of the individuals being mentored. Only the Lord knows the heart, and we can easily be fooled in this matter, as I have been many times. However, as the Lord Jesus foretold, Matt. 7. 17-23, there will be many on the Day of Judgement who will learn that *knowing* about the Lord and *doing* works in His name are not the same as *trusting* Him for salvation and *following* after Him. Those who know Christ as Saviour do works of righteousness for Him, Matt. 7. 21, while those who don't work to be seen by others, 7. 22. Humility and faithfulness are marks

of a believer. A true profession of faith is evident, in time, by good and consistent fruit-bearing, 2 Cor. 7. 10. True believers may indeed fall from time to time, but there is a consistent testimony of God's life within them which cannot be hidden; a good tree bears good fruit.

With this said, we also don't expect a baby to be earning income for the family two weeks after birth. In fact, newborns don't do much more than sleep, eat, cry, and soil nappies/diapers for quite a while. Eventually, however, they begin to smile, then jabber, crawl, and walk; before long, the nappy/diaper brigade transitions into a helpful workforce in the home! Likewise, new Christians need frequent feedings of the sincere milk of the word, 1 Pet. 2. 2, but, in time, they should move on to solid food and become labourers for Christ, Heb. 5. 12-14. So what do you do with someone who has professed Christ, but after months of investment, this person remains spiritually lethargic? Of course, there are many individual variables that should be considered, but Paul does provide us with two truths which bound the answer to this question. The first illustrates the need of patient and persistent care for a spiritual charge; the second addresses the need to commit to reliable people who will be faithful to what they are taught.

'But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us', 1 Thess. 2. 7-8 NKJV

'Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also', 2 Tim 2. 1-2.

ng Generation



By **WARREN HENDERSON**
Chippewa Falls, WI, USA

In these verses we notice Paul's example of nurturing the Thessalonian believers and his exhortation to Timothy to invest only in those who would be faithful to the truth. Striking the balance between these two bookends is one of the difficult tasks of discipleship. Those who profess Christ as Saviour will require tender care and regular feeding of the sincere milk of the word, that is the rudiments of the Christian faith,¹ to encourage their growth, yet maturity must be realized. Maturity is evidenced by a deepening devotion to Christ, being a witness for Christ, spending time in Bible study and prayer, repenting and forsaking sin, and faithfully attending the meetings of the church.

False professors or the apathetic can absorb our time and distract us from fulfilling the great commission. If professing believers do not exhibit spiritual growth after a few months of nurturing, it would be appropriate to commit them to the Lord, and to discontinue meeting with them.² A shepherd must be like a nurse who cherishes her children, but who also has the discernment to commit to those who will be faithful to what is taught and who will pass on what they know of the Saviour to others.

Be Prompt

A new convert's first year is a critical time. It has been my experience that those who receive good spiritual care in the early months will go on for Christ, while those who are neglected seem to develop lethargic behaviour patterns that cripple their spiritual vigour for life. In the same way that a newborn needs frequent feedings, bathing, nappy/diaper changes, etc. to develop physically, a new believer requires frequent care to mature spiritually. A good spiritual nursery for a newborn in Christ includes a shepherd who lives sound doctrine as an example to follow and is available to spend time with the one being nurtured.³ It is my goal to get a new believer in at least two Bible studies a week, preferably three, for the first six months of spiritual life.

Be Patient

The Lord Jesus exhibited tremendous patience as He prepared Peter to become an apostle. The Lord called Peter to follow Him on three separate occasions and, after each time, Peter dedicated more of himself to Christ. First, Peter forsook his fishing nets to follow Christ at His bidding, Mark 1. 18. Later, Peter forsook all to pursue the Saviour, Luke 5. 11. After Christ's resurrection, the Lord again called Peter to follow Him, with the understanding that it would cost Peter his life, John 21. 15-19. A few days earlier, Peter had vehemently denied the Lord to protect himself from harm, but it is at this juncture that Peter settled 'the death question' once and for all. He had learned that it was harder to live for the Lord than to die for Him. In Acts chapter 2 we do not see a shrinking, denying Peter, but a fully restored, Spirit-filled disciple preaching Christ to the saving of 3,000 souls. The Lord's patience with Peter is an encouragement to all those who are involved in training others. As previously discussed, a shepherd must be discerning, but also patient and tender. New believers need 'breathing room' – don't try to convict them and conform them to your pattern of Christianity before the Holy Spirit works in their hearts or they might turn into a religious legalist instead of a disciple of Christ. Prioritize needful exhortations; not everything needs to be corrected all at once, and often the less serious matters will resolve themselves as the young believer submits to the leading and conviction of God in his or her life.

Beware of Tumbleweeds

A tumbleweed is created when a densely branched plant, such as amaranth, breaks off from its root at the end of its growing season and then rolls on the ground in whatever direction the wind blows. Tumbleweeds are dead; they have no root. In the same manner, today there are many who just blow from church to church without ever developing a root system. Accordingly, 'tumbleweeds' are rarely a productive part of a church meeting. Although these people

are quite willing to take part in the privileges of church life, they avoid its responsibilities and shun commitment. Shepherds should be cautious of investing much time in those who will just 'blow on' in a year or two.

Over the past twenty-five years, my wife and I have been sharing the gospel, teaching those who respond to it, and witnessing new church meetings begin. In our experience, new believers do not usually cause the problems in the local assembly; rather, contentions typically come from those who 'bounce around' from church to church. Initially, 'tumbleweeds' may be enthusiastic and energetic, but that excitement can be quickly transposed to some other new idea, movement, or meeting, and in a short time they blow on to the next thing that catches their interest. A new assembly, which requires a group of dedicated believers to see the effort of church planting through its initial difficulties, is better off without 'tumbleweeds'.

Summary

Paul's example and instruction provides us with guidance as to how much time we should invest into the lives of others. Gentle, personal, and consistent care of newborns is a must; the first six months is key to establishing spiritual patterns for life – we cannot neglect new converts. In time, those who are truly saved will increase in their understanding of scripture and be more apt to following Christ. Those who are not moving forward to maturity must be committed to the Lord and the mentor must move on to help those who will profit from his or her efforts. This is often a painful experience, but our sojourn here is brief and we don't want to waste what little time we do have on those who are not benefiting from our ministry.

Endnotes

- 1 See 1 Pet. 2. 2; Heb. 5. 12.
- 2 It is important to leave them with an open invitation for further study in the future, should they decide to commit to spiritual things.
- 3 See 2 Thess. 3. 7-9; Acts 11. 25-26.

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The Challenges and Bless

It may come as a surprise to many that foster care, like many pertinent issues in society today, is referred to directly in God's timeless word, the Bible. In Acts chapter 13, Manaen, one of the prophets and teachers in the church at Antioch, is described as someone 'brought up with Herod, the tetrarch', v. 1. The Greek word used by Luke is *suntrophos*, meaning 'childhood companion'. It strongly suggests that he was the foster brother of Herod Antipas and, thus, the foster son of Herod the Great. It's true – the concept of foster care can be found in the Bible! It substantiates the fact that

foster care is not just a contemporary issue but one that has existed for a long time, extending all the way back to the New Testament era. It further reinforces the fact that there has probably always been the need to provide an alternative home environment for children to come under the care of parents who are not their own naturally. Whether a wicked individual like Herod the Great provided a caring home environment could easily be debated, but, regardless, the record of scripture states that Manaen was brought up in his household and apparently with legal recognition.

An even more outstanding example of foster care in the Bible, however, is that of Joseph with our Lord Jesus. He, who was conceived through the agency of the Holy Spirit and not the biological son of Joseph, came under Joseph's parental care at birth and was referred to later as 'the carpenter's son', Matt. 13. 55. The implication was that the people of that time recognized that a familial relationship did indeed exist. Whether Joseph legally 'adopted' the Lord, as we understand adoption today, cannot be verified – scripture is silent on the matter, but the evidence seems to indicate that it might have been a possibility. Thinking it through, how Joseph provided for his family and protected the Lord when they went down to Egypt, Matt. 2. 13-23, underscores how important foster care can be and what a difference it can make!

What is Foster Care?

By definition, foster care is helping to promote a child's growth and development for a period of time by someone other than the child's biological parents. This may be due to an adverse situation that may occur such as the death of the parents. Or, it may be due to those parents being deemed unfit by social agencies to adequately meet their child's basic needs for an adequate upbringing. The need to remove the child from the household into a safer environment could last for a shorttime, or longer depending upon the circumstances.

Either way, the goal ultimately is for reunification of the child with the natural parents, at which time the role and responsibilities of the foster parents are relinquished.

Some Reasons Why People Get Involved in Foster Care

Many couples consider the possibility of engaging in foster care for a variety of reasons. For some, it is simply a matter of wanting to be a contributing member of society, able to provide a supportive and secure home environment for children in need at a vulnerable time in their lives. They want the best for that child agreeing to provide the necessary care while under their guardianship, a privilege granted to them by a properly-designated social agency which typically provides a financial stipend to help defray the expenses involved in the care of the child. This privilege is until the natural parents are able to get 'back on their feet' and the child is returned to that household or that of their relatives, unless other options for the child are necessary. Many participate in foster care under this arrangement for an indefinite period of time. Cases exist even in which some have fostered literally dozens of children (and more!) in this way over many years.

For others, foster care may be motivated by a desire to help that child grow and develop socially alongside their own child, providing a mutual benefit to both. Perhaps





ings of Foster Care

this was the case with Manaen. While it can accomplish this, it could always be short-lived since the goal of all foster care is reunification with the natural family – something that could occur at anytime in the process.

For others, participating in foster care might be with the hope that it might lead to adoption, as it has in many cases. The maternal (and paternal) instinct is powerful and couples can have a strong yearning to enter into parenthood, especially when they see it in the lives of their peers. Some even spend a great amount of money in the attempt, with medical help, to have children of their own – some with success and some without. While others may have sufficient financial resources and have gone the direct route of international or domestic adoption, others may not, and consequently see in foster care an opportunity for an indirect route to adoption, though it is not always assured.

The Blessings of Foster Care

The blessings of foster care are many. It gives an opportunity to bring a child or, in some cases children, into a home where the real-life needs of that young person are met. For the Christian especially, it provides the golden opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ in a very practical way, which could make an eternal difference in the life of that person as they hear the gospel and see the love of Christ portrayed in that sanctified household. It is truly a 'good work', Titus 3. 14. Whether it leads to adoption or not, there is a sense for those who choose to participate in foster care that it is time well spent, invested in things that truly matter – people – and not in the shallow or passing pursuits that characterize this world, 1 Cor. 7. 31. For the Christian, the care extended to these children can be viewed especially as the selfless care of the Lord for us, and, in the case in which foster care leads to adoption, a picture of our adoption in Christ, Eph. 1. 5; Gal. 4. 5. At the very least, it can be easily seen as the Lord's bringing about the opportunity through His sovereign leading.



The Challenges of Foster Care

However, as many blessings as there are in foster care, there are many challenges as well. These should definitely be taken into account before considering it. Not every foster care situation is rosy and bright. While many foster children are very lovable and cute, some can present a variety of challenges stemming from the dysfunctional home from which they came. Children from these homes may have personal or even medical deficiencies and difficult attitudes to overcome as a result of the neglect or abuse they received from their natural parents. This can present a daunting challenge to those who have agreed to allow them into their homes to care for them. It may put strain upon that household, depending upon the expectations of the foster parents and the other children in that home. The flip side of this challenge is the bonding that can occur because of the personal sacrifice and time invested, another important aspect of foster care.

Additionally, there may be required visitation in which the foster parents are required to bring the child to an agency office, so that the natural parents can maintain contact with their children. This is often court-sanctioned and not an option, but a directive from a municipal judge. Depending upon the situation, this can significantly impinge upon the foster parents' personal time schedule and be rather unnerving as they sense a continuing negative influence by the natural parents in the life of the child, though this is not always the case. Further, the social agencies who are ultimately responsible by law for their oversight of the foster children can be viewed

by some as being overly intrusive as they are required to qualify the foster parents initially, inspect the home to make sure that it meets agency standards, and then maintain a close watch to ensure that these foster children are properly cared for. They can hardly be blamed for doing so, especially in the light of a few celebrated cases of foster care abuse. However, the relationship between foster parent and foster care agency is usually positive and congenial, since it is a relationship that has been entered into on a voluntary basis.

Foster care may not be for everyone, but it offers the opportunity to truly make a difference in the life of a child and can be extremely rewarding. For the Christian especially, it provides the means by which we can let our 'light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven', Matt. 5. 16. This is true not only in the life of the foster child and in some instances to the natural parents, but also to the agency representative (with whom there is plenty of interaction) not to mention our neighbours and those in our own church family. Foster care can be a great blessing and, for those special cases which lead to adoption, a blessing beyond compare. 'The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way', Ps. 37. 23. Perhaps He is ordering your steps in this direction so that you too will become involved in foster care.

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A Christian's personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is unique. It is so in the sense that He is a Person we have never seen.¹ We have never heard the sound of His voice. It is special because He is the source of our spiritual life. Yet this Person whom we have never seen is described by the apostle Paul as being 'our life', Col. 3. 4. In what way are we to understand the uniqueness of this personal relationship?

Two issues arise here. The first relates to knowing; the second relates to assurance, and yet the two are inextricably linked. Our knowledge comes from our commitment by faith to the trustworthiness of the scriptures and our assurance as the promises are made real to us by the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the scriptures there is plenty of evidence to substantiate the claim that Christ is our life. For the purposes of this article we shall concentrate on the writings of John and Paul. One trend we need to guard against is looking beyond the Saviour to the benefits He brings us rather than focussing on the greatness of His Person. It is not an exaggeration to say that He reaches out over the great span of time that divides us from Him historically and changes us so we become new creatures in Him, 2 Cor. 5. 17. He also bridges the great gulf that exists vertically between where He is, glorified in heaven, and where we are, here on earth. It is the Holy Spirit that makes this living bond real and intimate. But is our confidence in Him well founded?

Christ the Originator of all Things

Our confidence lies, firstly, in the relationship between Christ and creation. There are many significant statements that point to Christ as the One through whom and in whom creation occurs.² In the words of St. Augustine, 'All things from Angels to worms'.³ In verse 4 of John chapter 1, John writes, 'In him was life' and thus there is ascribed to the Word this quality and value of life. How could all things have come into being from the Word? Well, says John, 'In him was life', not only to create life but also to continually support it.

Christ our

'I am come that they might have life', John 10. 10

However, there is more than natural life implied here, for verse 4 speaks of this self-possessed life as being, 'the light of men'. He is the source of the new and supernatural life, which comes to us in salvation. We have the words of the Lord himself, 'As the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself', John 5. 26.

The Bible underscores the Creator/creature distinction with a clear line of demarcation between the living God, who is everlasting, unoriginated, and human beings, whose lives are derived and contingent. We read of God, 'For with thee is the fountain of life', Ps. 36. 9. But this divine prerogative has been imparted to the Son, not in time but from eternity, so that the Son Himself is the source of life and not just an agent of it. He is the manifestation in space and time of, 'that eternal life which was with the Father', 1 John 1. 2. As a consequence of His personal identity, He is the very bearer of the life of God but this life is not for Himself, it is for 'the life of the world', John 6. 51. For Paul also, the pre-existent Christ was involved in willing into existence the created order, so he could write, 'And one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him', 1 Cor. 8. 6. When Paul uses the word 'we' he is referring specifically to Christians and tracing the origins and existence of their spiritual lives to the Lord Jesus. In Colossians chapter 1 the ideas of creation and redemption are again united; the One by whom 'all things were created', v. 16, is the same One who has 'made peace through the blood of his cross', v. 20.

Christ the Originator of Spiritual Life

The Saviour defines His mission as one of coming 'that ye might have life',

John 10. 10. One of the underlying themes of John's Gospel is life and 'that ye might have life through his name', 20. 31. In the presentation of the Saviour, John demonstrates that He is indeed the source of eternal life, not merely projected into the future but presently realized and enjoyed. The epithet 'eternal' does not postpone the promise to the future but, through Christ, this quality of life is bestowed here and now. The presentation of Christ as the source of life is ably demonstrated in the discourses that make up the core of John's Gospel; it is the key word that links them together. What should impress us is the frequency of personal pronouns, especially the 'I am' sayings. These sayings

cover a wide range of metaphors. He is 'the bread of life', 6. 35, 51; 'the light of life', 8. 12; 'the good shepherd', 10. 11, 28; 'the resurrection and the life', 11. 25; and the way, the truth, and the life, 14. 6. In these claims we are presented with One who can sustain us, who can light our darkness, who can care for us, and who can impart to us eternal life itself. The Saviour defines the essence of eternal life as knowing 'the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent', 17. 3. It is not a mere theoretical knowledge but a relationship that should vitally affect every aspect of our lives as we aspire to be more Christ-like. The overwhelming picture of the Saviour presented by John is not only of His divine identity but also of His willingness to communicate eternal life to a lost humanity.

The idea that the Lord is the giver of life is not restricted to the writings of John. For Paul, Christ is also, and indeed always, the source of spiritual life, 'For to me to live is Christ', Phil. 1. 21. Paul's experience of Christ is different from that of John.

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Life

John had lived with the Saviour; Paul's experience of Christ was post-resurrection and ascension. This did not in any way diminish the reality of Paul's faith or commitment to the cause of the Saviour. In our natural state we were spiritually dead but, says Paul, 'Even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ', Eph. 2. 5 ESV. There is a vital connection here of cause and effect; if Christ was not alive we could not be spiritually alive in Him. Paul tells the Romans, 'The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord', Rom. 6. 23. The great emphasis is on the magnitude of what is given. It is eternal life but, great as the gift is, it must never be allowed to overshadow or minimize the truth that it is in Christ Jesus that eternal life exists for the Christian. In 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us the last Adam became, 'a life giving spirit', 15. 45 ESV. The contrast in this verse could hardly be greater. The first Adam left us in such a state that it required the incoming of the last Adam, 'the Lord from heaven', 15. 47, to bring through His person and work, life that is unending in blessedness and glory. This will be fully realized in our resurrection and glorification.

On this same theme Paul writes, 'When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory', Col. 3. 4. To outward appearance, the Christian may seem like every other human being but Paul says the taproot of our life is centred elsewhere, 'our life is hid with Christ in God', v. 3. But our life shall not remain hidden forever, only till He appears and we share in His glorious appearing. Because Christ is our life now He is also the source of our hope for the future. The Lord is not trapped in history but is the life source of our present Christian experience. We take seriously the

promise of the Saviour, 'Because I live, ye shall live also', John 14. 19. Our prime source of knowledge for believing this is the testimony of scripture; our personal experience of this is the internal witness of the Holy Spirit who 'beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God', Rom. 8. 16. Here there is united together the two thoughts of Word and Spirit that assure us that Christ is our life, for the Holy Spirit is the one who makes Christ real in our individual and corporate experience as Christians.

As we contemplate our present Christian experience it knows of periods of growth and flourishing, but also periods that are extremely arid. There may be times when we feel beleaguered, lonely and, sometimes, even like giving up. The age in which we live is secular. We are increasingly bombarded with anti-Christian propaganda. But why do we go on? Beneath the surface of our lives there is a source, a spring of life, that 'though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day', 2 Cor. 4. 16. We say with Peter, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life', John 6. 68. Paul could say, 'But Christ liveth in

me', Gal. 2. 20. We find continuous invigoration from the One who is the inexhaustible fount of our spiritual life. J. S. STEWART could write, 'This is Paul's glory and joy - life, with the stamp of eternity on it, a present possession'.⁴ Projecting our thoughts to the future we think of some of the last words in the Bible, 'I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely', Rev. 21. 6.

Endnotes

- 1 John 20. 29; 1 Pet. 1. 8.
- 2 Col. 1. 16; Heb. 1. 2 and, of course, the introduction to John's Gospel. John tells us, 'All things were made by him', John 1. 3. That is, amongst other things, the world as the sum total of its individual parts, not just some things or many things but 'all things'.
- 3 *St Augustine Tractate 1*, John 1. 1-5, Nicene/Post-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7.
- 4 J. S. STEWART, *A Man in Christ*, Hodder & Stoughton, pg. 193.

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The third chapter of Philippians continues Paul's assault on the self-consuming error that threatened the progress of the gospel. In particular, he demolishes false teaching that placed the emphasis on man rather than God. This insidious notion is a time-honoured tactic of the devil for robbing the Almighty of glory and deluding people into thinking that they have intrinsic merit apart from Him. In turn, this leads them to mistakenly believe that they can earn a righteous standing before the Lord. In contrast, the truth declares that man is a bankrupt sinner, yet God is a gracious Saviour who provides righteousness and salvation through His Son. He died, rose again, and ascended to provide this gift to those who receive it by faith, John 1. 12.

A simple outline of the chapter:

Addressing self-seeking false teachers, 3. 1-2;
Paul's past, present and future regarding righteousness, 3. 3-14;
Exhortation to a godly walk in view of Christ's second coming and the resurrection of their bodies, 3. 15-21.

The Joy of Correct Doctrine

Some might sarcastically remark that Paul begins with 'finally' and then carries on for two more chapters! The phrase means 'pertaining to the part of a whole which remains or continues, and thus constitutes the rest of the whole – "rest, remaining, what remains, other"; it is a frequently-used Greek phrase for moving on to another section of a work.¹

At the commencement of a passage correcting serious error it might surprise one to find the apostle saying, 'Rejoice in the Lord', v. 1, yet only in holding to the truth about Christ may one find the true basis of joy.

Paul did not find it the slightest bit tedious to repeat the teaching about God's genuine righteousness versus the world's fraudulent version. KELLY explains the apostle's thinking, 'It was no trouble to him,

Philippians: The Joy and Suffering

Chapter 3 verses 1-21: CORRECTION OF SERIOUS ERROR

for he loved them too well to mind it. It was safe for them, for Satan threatened otherwise. Joy in the Lord is the truest safeguard against the religious snares of the enemy'.² As MOULE paraphrases it, 'Safe, because there are spiritual dangers around you from which this will be the best preservative; false teachings which can only be fully met with the gladness of the truth of Christ'.³ Amid the modern onslaught of doctrinal error, the church must continue to 'preach the word' even in the face of the fickle 'itching-ears' culture that grips many church-goers, 2 Tim. 4. 2-4.

A Threefold Denunciation

Paul describes the false teachers in scathingly satirical terms, vividly evoking their true nature. As MARTIN remarks, 'The threefold warning is couched in strong, vigorous language with the repetition of the verb in the imperative mood, *blepete*, "look out for", "be warned against", betraying something of the tense earnestness and emphasis of a serious warning'.⁴ His terminology mocks the false teachers' boastful claims. First, he refers to them as 'dogs', a metaphor for their uncleanness, Rev. 22. 15. Ironically, Jews referred to Gentiles using this exact expression.⁵ Thus, this was a rebuke of their obsession with Jewish rites and ceremonies.

Second, Paul tells them, 'Beware of evil workers', v. 2. Despite their practise of attaching the works of the law to the gospel, he says that these teachers are actually evil, for their works emanate from and glorify man's own self. MOULE's paraphrase captures the thought well, 'Beware of the evil workmen, the teachers whose watchword is "works, works, works," a weary round of observances and would-be merits, but who are sorry *work-men* indeed, spoiling the whole structure of Heaven's easy, artless, unencumber'd plan'.⁶ Salvation is not the product of meritorious

works. True Christians do good works because they have been saved by grace and have the indwelling Spirit producing fruit in their lives.⁷

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The third description calls them 'the concision' – or 'mutilation' as other translations render it.⁸ This is a parody of the false teacher's insistence on circumcision as necessary for salvation. Greek

scholars point out the literary precision of the apostle's language, 'Paul will not give it its proper name *peritom*. Instead, by a pun, he mockingly calls it a mere cutting, *katatom*, i.e., mutilation of the body on a par with pagan practices forbidden in Leviticus 21, verse 5 (cf. 1 Kgs. 18:28, and the frenzied rituals of the devotees of Cybele'.⁹ Once more MOULE captures the sense of the warning, 'Beware of the concision, the apostles of a mere physical wounding, which, as enjoined according to their principles, is nothing better than a mutilation . . . a parody of what circumcision was meant to be, as the sacrament of a preparatory dispensation now terminated in its fulfillment'.¹⁰ Instead of performing a surgical ritual that gave its adherents standing before God, they succeeded only in mutilating them.

This erroneous emphasis on circumcision is fascinating, given the biblical history of the symbol. Originally, it was meant as a sign of cutting off the flesh, symbolically, asserting that human effort is to be rejected in favour of the Lord's work on behalf of His people. The Almighty gave it to Abraham in Genesis chapter 17 after the patriarch vainly attempted to bring about the divine promise through his efforts with Hagar, Gen. 16. Instead of resting in the divine promise to miraculously give a child through Sarai, Abram sought to bring about the prophecy through surrogate motherhood, thereby circumventing his barren wife. God rejected this humanly planned and implemented innovation, in its

ring of the Furtherance of the Gospel Part Nine

OR AMONG BELIEVERS

place giving Abraham a sign that reminded him of the one-party covenant where the obligations were solely on God's side, Gen. 15. 9-21. In the New Testament era, however, the false teachers were using it to do the very thing that it repudiated in type.

The Spiritual contrasted with the Fleshly

In contrast to the Judaizers, Paul asserts that Christians 'are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh', v. 3. The true circumcision are those who truly cut off the flesh, not through surgery, but through a rejection of human effort and a reliance on divine grace through the Holy Spirit. Instead of relying on human works to gain favour with God, they worship Him in the Spirit (here the NKJV rightly capitalizes 'Spirit', for it refers to the Holy Spirit). What is more, their joy centres on Christ and His work, not on their own feeble doings. Lastly, they do not trust in themselves or

their attainments. As MOULE words it, 'Quite lit., "not in the flesh are confident"; with the implication that we are confident, on another and a truer ground'.¹¹ The term 'flesh' is descriptive of what man can do. Another writer explains, "'Flesh" refers first to the rite of circumcision but now carries all the theological overtones of trying to have grounds for boasting before God in human achievement, the ultimate self-centered expression of life'.¹² In this connection IRONSIDE's eloquent words are appropriate, 'The flesh of the believer is no more to be trusted than the flesh of the vilest sinner . . . The fleshly nature is never improved, and the new nature received in new birth does not require improvement'.¹³

Rather than trust in themselves, believers look to the righteousness which God provides through Christ. If one looks to human religious credentials then Saul of Tarsus – as the unconverted Paul was known – possessed a peerless resumé. Nevertheless, he set aside his pretended righteousness – with its carefully cultivated façade of apparent spirituality – in order to gain a real form of righteousness from the holy God, vv. 4-7. The early verses of Philippians chapter 3 have already set before the reader the contrast between the pseudo-spirituality of the Judaizers and the true spirituality engendered by the gospel of Christ.

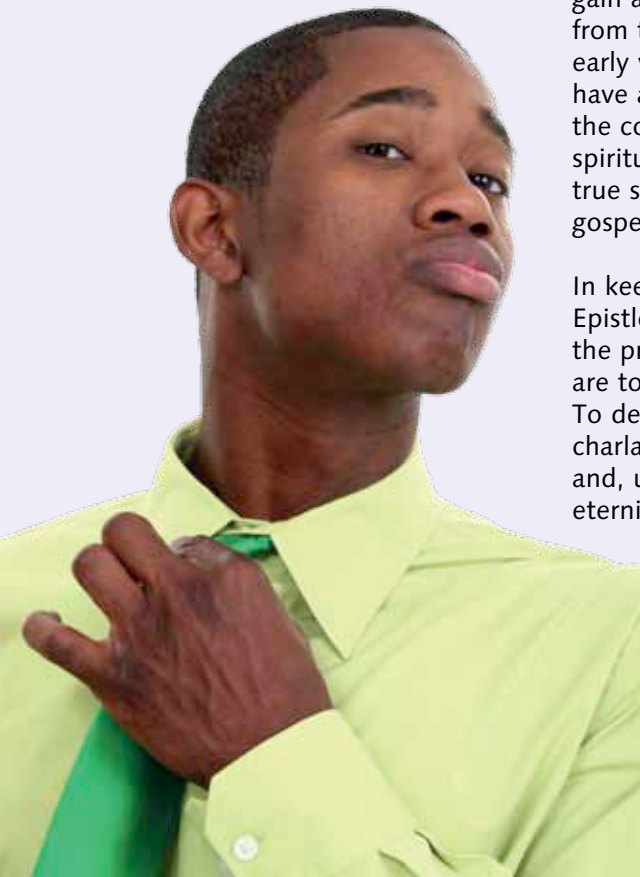
In keeping with the theme of the Epistle, the pathway to true joy and the progress of the genuine gospel are to be found in Christ alone. To deviate from this is to follow charlatans to one's cost in time – and, ultimately, to destruction in eternity. The contemporary scene has plenty of 'dogs' who add human works and ceremonies for salvation – or even in the name of Christian growth. Others emphasize philanthropy – 'good works' of sorts such as environmentalism and social engagement – to the exclusion of correct doctrine (e.g., the

Emergent Church movement). Still others want to revive sacraments, incense, and other physical rites in the name of spirituality (e.g., the Ancient-Future Movement). Like our predecessor, Paul, modern believers must vigilantly hold to the grace of God which is revealed in the true gospel.

Endnotes

- 1 J. P. LOUW & E. A. NIDA. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Vol. 1. New York: United Bible societies, 1996, pg. 614.
- 2 WILLIAM KELLY, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, found here: <http://www.stempublishing.com/authors/kelly/2Newtest/philipns.html> Accessed on 23 March 2011.
- 3 H. C. G. MOULE, *Philippian Studies*, New York: Hodder & Stoughton, n.d., pg. 160.
- 4 RALPH P. MARTIN, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Vol. 11. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987, pg. 145. [Italics original.]
- 5 Pss. 22. 16; 68. 23; Mark 7. 27-28. See also extra-biblical examples in Enoch 89. 42; Ignatius to the Ephesians 7. 1. Also, BEN WITHERINGTON III advises, 'See the handling of Exod. 22. 31 in Mishnah Ned. 4. 3 and Bek. 5. 6). Generally speaking, dogs were not pets in antiquity, but rather ran wild, but there was an exception – the guard dog . . . Paul with rhetorical flair here has changed the term "dog" so it refers to those who insist on circumcision'. From the blog, *The Bible & Culture*: <http://blog.beliefnet.com/bibleandculture/2010/03/beware-of-the-dogs---philippians-32.html#ixzz0sBVrnjpp>. Accessed on 4 May 2011.
- 6 H. C. G. MOULE, *Philippian Studies*, pg. 160. [Italics original.]
- 7 Eph. 2. 8-10; Phil. 2. 12-13; John 15. 1-10; Gal. 5. 22-25.
- 8 See, for example, the NKJV and NASBmg.
- 9 MARTIN, pg. 146. [Italics original.]
- 10 H. C. G. MOULE, *Philippian Studies*, pg. 160f.
- 11 H. C. G. MOULE, *The Cambridge Bible: Philippians*, pg. 86. [Italics original.]
- 12 GORDON FEE, IVP *New Testament Commentary: Philippians*. Electronic ed. (1999; QV '08 STEP Files, 2006). [Italics original.]
- 13 H.A. IRONSIDE, *Notes on the Epistle to the Philippians*. Loizeaux Brothers: Neptune, NJ, 1922, pg. 74.

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CHURCH GATHERING

In Matthew chapter 18, verse 20 the Lord Jesus planted a seed thought which blossomed in the book of Acts and bore fruit in the Epistles. One of the reasons given by the Lord when he called the twelve in Mark's Gospel was 'that they should be with him', and that privileged band of followers are found in His company throughout the Gospel records hearing Him preach, teach and pray. They would have noticed that He had time for the children and drew from them an illustration of conversion, Matt. 18. 3; yet His message also reached the heart of the scholarly 'teacher of Israel', John 3. 10 JND. They would remember that He regularly crossed the social divide and brought the word of salvation to both Pharisee and publican alike. Many times He addressed a multitude, but often met with individuals. On occasion, 'they came to him' and He taught them and fed them; other times He would go to where the needy were, in Samaria, Gadara and Bethesda. The faithful eleven would never forget that night when He said, 'With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer', and as they later took from His hand bread and wine, symbols of a new covenant, the words 'this do in remembrance of me' would be indelibly etched on their hearts.

It was against such a background of example and instruction that the early disciples sought to carry out the Lord's commission and, with the assurance of His presence, they obeyed the command to go into all the world and preach the gospel, to teach, baptize, and to make disciples. The distinction between the whole church, the body of Christ, and believers meeting together in a locality according to the New Testament pattern, often referred

to as 'a local church', has been well taught and documented. From the earliest days after Pentecost, groups of Christians met together, often in the home of one of their number, not simply on the basis of friendship but as an expression of fellowship; a united desire to be obedient to the word of God and to present a cohesive witness to a hostile world. The fragmentation which developed later into sects and denominations was largely unknown in apostolic days. Warnings were given of impending disruption, e.g., Acts 20. 29-30; 2 John 7-11, but, in those early pristine days, the well rehearsed formula of Acts chapter 2 verses 41 and 42 gives a clear outline of the activities engaged in by the first companies of believers.

If we consider those verses as an initial response to the Lord's teaching and example, the first occupation of the early believers was gospel outreach. For folk to 'gladly receive' the word, it must first be made known. At Pentecost and for the time which followed, the miraculous gift of tongues, known and recognized languages, granted to the apostles and other early believers, enabled the gospel to be spread quickly, as well as providing 'a sign' for the Jews and proselytes that God was indeed working. Starting at Jerusalem the apostles presented a united front in preaching the gospel and, after the initial acceptance when they had 'favour with all the people', Acts 2. 47, their message soon attracted opposition. The healing of the lame man in chapter 3 brought repercussions and, after a brief confinement, 'being let go, they went to their own company', a lovely expression suggesting unity, fellowship, singleness of purpose, and a place of safety, features which

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RINGS

PART ONE

should be recognizable in a local church or assembly.

Before the end of chapter 5 the high priest complained, 'Ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine', what an accolade! But now the time had come to broaden the field and the apostles, together with other believers, consequent upon the persecution which followed the death of Stephen, began to move out to Judaea and Samaria, and from there the work has progressed, 'to the uttermost parts of the world'.

It is evident that the gospel work in those early days involved an itinerant ministry, sometimes singly, often in pairs and occasionally in larger numbers. On several occasions in his Epistles the apostle Paul addressed individuals and greeted 'the church that is in thy house'. J. B. LIGHTFOOT, in his commentary on *Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Philemon*, asserts that 'there is no clear example of a separate building set apart for Christian worship within the limits of the Roman Empire before the third century'. In the years that followed, Christian witness developed, and it became normal and accepted practice for a suitable building to be used in which to meet in order to engage in the communal practices indicated in the New Testament. It may be worth remembering that the Gospel Halls and other buildings where we meet are nothing more than that, convenient buildings. The architecture and design may be appealing in an aesthetic sense but the practical suitability is more important. There should be respect for the place, not reverence; it is not 'consecrated ground'. It provides a focal point for the testimony, a place from which the gospel witness can radiate, where the word of God is taught and to which folk can be invited.

In many assemblies the formal 6.30 p.m. 'Gospel Meeting' has become something of an institution! Any suggestion of varying the time or the format is considered to be far too radical, something akin to 'removing the ancient landmarks' – anathema! In reality it is largely a relic of bygone days when most people attended a 'place of worship' on a Sunday evening, the time was convenient, there was no electricity, so after 'church', they would go home to bed in order to rise early for a day of manual labour. However, many people were saved as a result of the gospel being preached in this way; it worked! Often, what is not taken into consideration is that although the God of the gospel and the gospel of God do not change, society and its conduct do.

Church attendance fell away dramatically after two world wars. The word of God was systematically devalued in the education system, family values were eroded, technology and science became the new gods and what was already an immoral society fast became largely amoral. Yet this is our mission field, this is our parish! If the 6.30 p.m. meeting on a Sunday evening still sees the lost coming in, if there are still opportunities to use that hour to advantage, stay with it. But if that is the sum total of gospel outreach in the week, think again! The buildings we have can be put to good use to reach out to young and old at times convenient to them rather than to ourselves. But the great need for a society steeped in ignorance and submerged in apathy as far as the scriptures are concerned, is for believers to live the gospel before them, that the Lord whom we serve and the truth we believe are a living epistle, 'known and read of all men', 2 Cor. 3. 2.

Following the presentation and acceptance of the gospel, 'they that gladly received his word were baptized'. Most of our halls have

adequate facilities for baptisms, and many would like more opportunity to use them. A baptism is a joyous occasion and always a good opportunity to show hospitality and present the gospel to friends and relatives of the ones being baptized, often folk who would not normally attend a formal meeting. Doubtless, in the early days believers would gather together for such an event, not, however, in a building, but by a river, the sea or any suitable place where there was adequate depth of water, thus providing a very public testimony which would almost certainly attract a level of persecution. The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that baptism by immersion, symbol of death, burial and resurrection, is closely associated with conversion. It adds nothing to the work of salvation, the convert walks 'in newness of life' from the moment of believing, not from the time of baptism.

However, the practical experience and public witness of obedience to the word of God should give an impetus to the Christian's pathway. It would be true to say that many baptisms we attend are for the children of believers; those brought up with a familiarity of the various meetings of the assembly. Elders, as shepherds, should be aware of the spiritual progress of the lambs as well as the sheep of the flock, and it should come as no surprise when young believers ask for baptism. With those saved 'out of the world', there is often a clearer evidence of a changed life, but in all cases the overseers should be assured of the reality of the profession before announcing and arranging the baptism.

The expectation and outcome of 'steadfast continuance in the apostles' doctrine' will be considered later as we take a look at other 'church gatherings' identified in the New Testament.

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‘He did evil . . . like the house of Ahab’

Ahaziah

By **KEN TOTTON**

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Read: 2 Kings 8. 25-29; 9. 16ff.;
2 Chronicles 22. 1-9

Accession to the throne

Jehoshaphat's ill-advised marriage alliance with the house of Omri brought bitter results, 2 Chr. 18. 1. Athaliah, the queen mother, became dominant in Judah, indirectly through her youngest son Ahaziah,¹ and later directly as queen, 22. 10. Perhaps this is why the inhabitants of Jerusalem are mentioned by the chronicler. They helped secure the transfer of power realizing that Judah had been reduced to a very weak state, v. 1. Worse was to come.

Thus, in 841 BC, Ahaziah came to the throne at the age of twenty-two, 2 Kgs. 8. 26, and he reigned only one year. His name means 'Jehovah sustains', but a God-honouring name is no guarantee of right conduct. In fact, after the briefest of reigns the inspired summary is, 'He also walked in the way of the house of Ahab and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, as the house of Ahab had done', v. 27 ESV. A dreadful evaluation indeed! How solemn the brevity of this king's reign!

Wrong company

Whilst individuals are accountable to God for their own actions, Rom. 14. 12, we may note that the young king inherited an evil legacy from his father Jehoram, and, shockingly, was encouraged in wrongdoing by his infamous mother Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, 2 Chr. 22. 3. Ominously, it is to the apostate northern kingdom that he looked for counsel. 'Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals"', 1 Cor. 15. 33 ESV. Predictably, he soon joined Joram, king of Israel, in an ill-fated campaign against Hazael, king of Syria, vv. 5, 6. God's clarion call to separation is clear, Rev. 18. 4; if we consort with those under His judgement, we must expect to suffer their plagues.

Ahaziah's death

Jehu, son of Nimshi, was the divinely-

appointed executor of judgement to recompense the wickedness of Ahab and Jezebel. The sword of the bloodthirsty Jehu does not spare, and the hapless King Ahaziah is discovered in Samaria and slain.² Whilst Jehu had no specific remit to kill the king of Judah, the fact was that Ahaziah was a son of Athaliah and had followed in the ways of Ahab. Nevertheless, the chronicler sees the sovereign hand of God in the manner of Ahaziah's downfall. Apparently God intervened in judgement to prevent deeper apostasy, cp. 1 Cor. 11. 30. Thus, after a one-year reign the kingdom is reduced to complete impotence, 2 Chr. 22. 9.

Lessons

Jehoshaphat's misguided marriage alliance with the northern kingdom is a classic example of an unequal yoke. Scripture is crystal clear, 'Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?' 2 Cor. 6. 14. In the history of Ahaziah and Athaliah we see that it carried disastrous consequences *for several generations*. As believers we must exercise special care in choosing our close friends and companions.

Perhaps these narratives of the kings of Israel and Judah may seem remote from our present concerns. Yet the Lord addresses the church at Thyatira in terms highly reminiscent of the fate of Ahaziah, Rev. 2. 20-23. In that church there was one who corresponded to the Jezebel of the Old Testament – an influential woman

who advocated accommodation with paganism and idolatry. Business life in Thyatira was dominated by powerful trade guilds and it is likely that she suggested that Christians could compromise their separation by association with these guilds. Their links to idol temples meant that temptations would inevitably arise at such venues.³ The same Lord who executed comprehensive retribution on the house of Ahab through Jehu⁴ threatens the same on 'Jezebel' and those Thyatirans who are 'her children'. We are thus warned that compromise with modern forms of idolatry and immorality still incurs the condemnation of the Lord.

Notwithstanding Ahaziah's wretched record as a king, as a grandson of Jehoshaphat he is treated with dignity in his death. Regardless of the performance of individuals entrusted with sacred functions, there is due respect attaching to the *role* they discharge. King Saul behaved despicably, yet David would not put forth his hand against the 'the Lord's anointed'. We, too, need to be God-fearing in our attitudes towards fellow-servants in assembly life.

Endnotes

- 1 Also referred to as Jehoahaz, 2 Chr. 21. 17; 25. 23, a transposition of the component parts of his name. Ahaziah, king of Judah, is not to be confused with Ahaziah, the eighth king of Israel and son of Ahab and Jezebel, 1 Kgs. 22. 51 – 2 Kgs. 1. 18.
- 2 'The final movements of Ahaziah are difficult to trace but may perhaps be reconstructed as follows: he fled south from Jezreel so as to hide in Samaria. He was brought to Jehu, who fatally wounded him near Ibleam (between Jezreel and Samaria); he fled by chariot northwest to Megiddo, where he died (2 Kgs. 9. 27); and his body was carried by Ahaziah's servants to Jerusalem (9. 28), where they buried him'. *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pg. 508.
- 3 For further helpful background see COLIN J. HEMER, *The Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, pp. 108-121.
- 4 2 Kgs. 10. 7.

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THE FIRST EPISTLE OF JOHN

By **KEN TOTTON** Cambridge, England

(UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED, ALL QUOTATIONS OF SCRIPTURE ARE FROM THE NEW KING JAMES VERSION)

2

Prologue, 1. 1-4

John introduces his letter with a complex sentence, consisting of a series of profound statements. He sees no need to identify himself, implying that he is well-known to those to whom he writes and his authority is widely acknowledged. As with the opening of 'Hebrews', this ensures full focus on his *message* and the One in whom it centres. Since the main verb 'declare' (or, 'proclaim') is not encountered until verse 3, BRUCE supplies the following helpful paraphrase:

'Our theme is that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we beheld and our hands handled. Our theme in short, concerns the word of Life – that Life which was made manifest. Yes, we have seen and we bear witness; we make known to you the Eternal Life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us. What we have seen and heard we make known to you also, in order that you in your turn may have fellowship with us'.¹

The opening words remind us of the beginning of John's Gospel, 'In the beginning was the Word'; however, there are some significant differences. Whereas in the Gospel the theme is Christ presented as 'the Word', John 1. 1, 14, the unifying theme of this letter is *eternal life*.² Here 'word' is to be understood in the ordinary sense of 'message', hence in the above paraphrase it is appropriately in lower case. The repetition of the neuter pronoun '**that which was**' strictly points to the gospel message, but this centres in the person of Jesus Christ – the Life personified; hence the first-hand experiences which John describes.

'From the beginning'. This significant phrase occurs nine times in the letter:³ in each occurrence the context must determine exactly which 'beginning' John is referring to. In this instance it refers to the beginning of our Lord's life here on earth. In making this statement, 'that which was from the beginning', John sets out to expose and confound those who argued that Christ had not come in the flesh. Throughout the letter, it is not the existence of the eternal Word that is at stake, but rather the denial that the eternal Word had *permanently become flesh*.

Note the sense of excitement and *progress* in the verse, '**we have heard, seen with our eyes, beheld**' RV, our '**hands have handled**'. These rich experiences set John and his fellow-apostles apart from the opposing false teachers who could make no such claim in spite of all their pretences. 'The words "*have heard*" imply that their hearing Him personally has terminated, but His message still continues to ring in John's ears', HIEBERT.⁴ 'Seeing is more than hearing, and beholding (which requires time, John 1. 14, 34; Acts 1. 11) is more than seeing (which may be momentary); while handling is more than all', PLUMMER. These statements demolish at once the Docetic heresy (see Introduction: 'Heresies, Gnosticism') which claimed that Christ's body was a mere phantom. The incarnation is no myth, but solid objective reality; John, along with Peter, was an eyewitness of His majesty, 2 Pet. 1. 16. This matters enormously, for if He who is the Life did not become incarnate in genuine humanity as Jesus Christ, there can be no salvation! The next two verbs, '**looked upon, handled**', point to specific occasions when Christ in grace offered Himself to be '**handled**' by Thomas, John 20. 27, and the other disciples, Luke 24. 39,⁵ references to events after the resurrection.⁶

'With the Father', v. 2. This does not merely signify Christ's location, John 1. 1; rather, that the Life was that which *satisfied* the Father, the shared bliss of the life of the Godhead. The Life is thus personal; eternally it enabled the fellowship of divine Persons, and it was revealed in Jesus Christ. The Gospel opens by asserting that the Word was *with God*, whereas this letter asserts that the Life was *with the Father*; the former is directed to the *world* to evoke faith and produce spiritual life, John 20. 30, 31; the latter is directed to *believers* and supplies the tests by which we can judge whether we possess eternal life.

The emphasis here is on the historical *manifestation* of the Life, indicating that we can know exactly what *is* (and *is not*) eternal life – it has been fully displayed in Christ, John 1. 18. Had the Life remained with the Father, what utter darkness we would be in! God Himself has come down to us. Now there can be no need to speculate for the '**life has been manifested**'!⁷ The word 'manifested' implies Christ's pre-existence. Christ's work is all about revelation – the revelation of the reality of God, for example, the love of God, 4. 9.

'That you also may have fellowship with us', v. 3. John helpfully tells us why he is writing; see also 5. 13. Fellowship can have different shades of meaning: e.g., close relationship; intimate communion; to participate in something with someone; *common* possession of something with someone. Peter's 'partners' shared with him in the fishing operation, Luke 5. 10. Generally in this letter, though not always, '**us**' signifies the apostles. We cannot exaggerate their authority – it is the authority of Christ Himself, 'he who receives you (apostles) receives Me', Matt. 10. 40. Many of the problems addressed in the letter are caused by departure from the apostolic teaching; recovery, therefore, requires the recognition of the unique, complete, and permanent validity of the apostles' witness, which for us is preserved in the New Testament. See also 2 Peter 3. 15-16.

'You also': just as Peter, 2 Pet. 1. 1, rejoiced that those who had not seen Christ (as he had) had come to share in *faith* in Him, so John writes so that we can also enjoy the same glorious *fellowship* of knowing Him.

'With the Father and with⁸ His Son Jesus Christ'.

New birth enables a communion between our hearts and the Lord. More than this though, it enables us to enjoy *common possession* of eternal life with God. This is a permanent fact whether we are always conscious of it or not – a participation in the very life of God himself, John 14. 23. Only the power and grace of God can bring about such an amazing thing!

Cycle 1 – Revelation of the life eternal 1. 5 – 2. 28

John's flow of thought may be seen from his purpose in writing, as stated in chapter 5 verse 13, 'These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life'. He presents a series of tests to validate Christian faith, designed to:

- promote the assurance of personal salvation in the lives of his readers;
- enable them to detect and reject false teachers.

John introduces the moral test of fellowship with God, 1. 5 - 2. 6. Following on directly from the nature of God as light, 1. 5, this test is designed to expose those who made out that provided you were part of their circle, sin was not an important matter.⁹ Chapter 1 verses 6-10 shows how sin *hinders fellowship* and he points to the corrective action required; chapter 2 verses 1-2 identifies God's gracious provision for maintaining us in fellowship with Himself.

Walking in the light: Test – sin confessed, 1. 5 – 2. 2

This section spells out the implications of fellowship with God, v. 4. What is the character of the God who has called us into fellowship with Himself? John's message is plain and emphatic, 1. 5, '**God is light**' and in Him is no darkness at all'. Later, he will declare that 'God is *love*', 4. 8, a truth all the more wonderful given that He is also light. Light is the beginning of His creation, Gen 1. 3, and it is His covering, Ps. 104. 2. Christ declares Himself to be the Light of the world, John 8. 12. But what does this really mean? God is 'light' in two related senses:

- 1 Intellectually – Positively, God is self-revealing; His nature is to make Himself known. He is the source of all reality and truth; giver of all understanding and knowledge. Negatively, He exposes all that is false,
- 2 Morally – He is holy, righteous, and pure. It is particularly this moral aspect that is prominent in 1 John. Light and darkness correlate with good and evil, Isa. 5. 20.

We must understand that John is not here distinguishing between two *types* of believer, those who walk in the light and those who do not, nor the different *experiences* of a believer, sometimes in light, sometimes not; rather he is introducing a stringent test to *differentiate* a *true believer* from one who is a *mere professor*. The genuine believer not only 'comes to the light' at conversion but characteristically *continues* to walk in the light.¹⁰ John supplies clear tests to expose those who 'walk in darkness'. This is in keeping with John chapter 3 verses 20 and 21, where response to the light of God distinguishes the believer from the unbeliever.¹¹

Throughout the letter John addresses issues in black and white, allowing no shades of grey, 3. 10, yet his objective is always to bring assurance to those who are genuine. At the same time, we as readers must not be complacent, but, instead, realize the radical implications of the gospel for how we live.

'Walk' in the Bible signifies the ordinary course of life – one's progress, behaviour, Eph. 2. 2. This section, 1. 6-10, supplies a series of *tests* of eternal life – means for distinguishing those who are truly born again from those who are not. John is very fond of moral and spiritual opposites.¹² The table below highlights these opposites and indicates the increasing audacity of the claims of those in error, and correspondingly John's condemnations. The positive promises of verses 7 and 9 are interleaved.

v. 6	Negative	If we say that we have fellowship with Him,
		and walk in darkness,
		we lie and do not practice the truth
v. 7	Positive	But if we walk in the light as He is in the light,
		we have fellowship with one another,
		and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.
v. 8	Negative	If we say that we have no sin,
		we deceive ourselves,
		and the truth is not in us.
v. 9	Positive	If we confess our sins,
		He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins
		and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
v. 10	Negative	If we say that we have not sinned,
		we make Him a liar,
		and His word is not in us.

If chapter 1 is concerned with *where* we walk, chapter 2 will go on to discuss *how* we walk. All believers should be conscious of sin in the light of God's holiness, Isa. 6. 5; Ps. 36. 9. Once 'darkness', they are now 'light in the Lord', Eph. 5. 8, and have the privilege of walking before

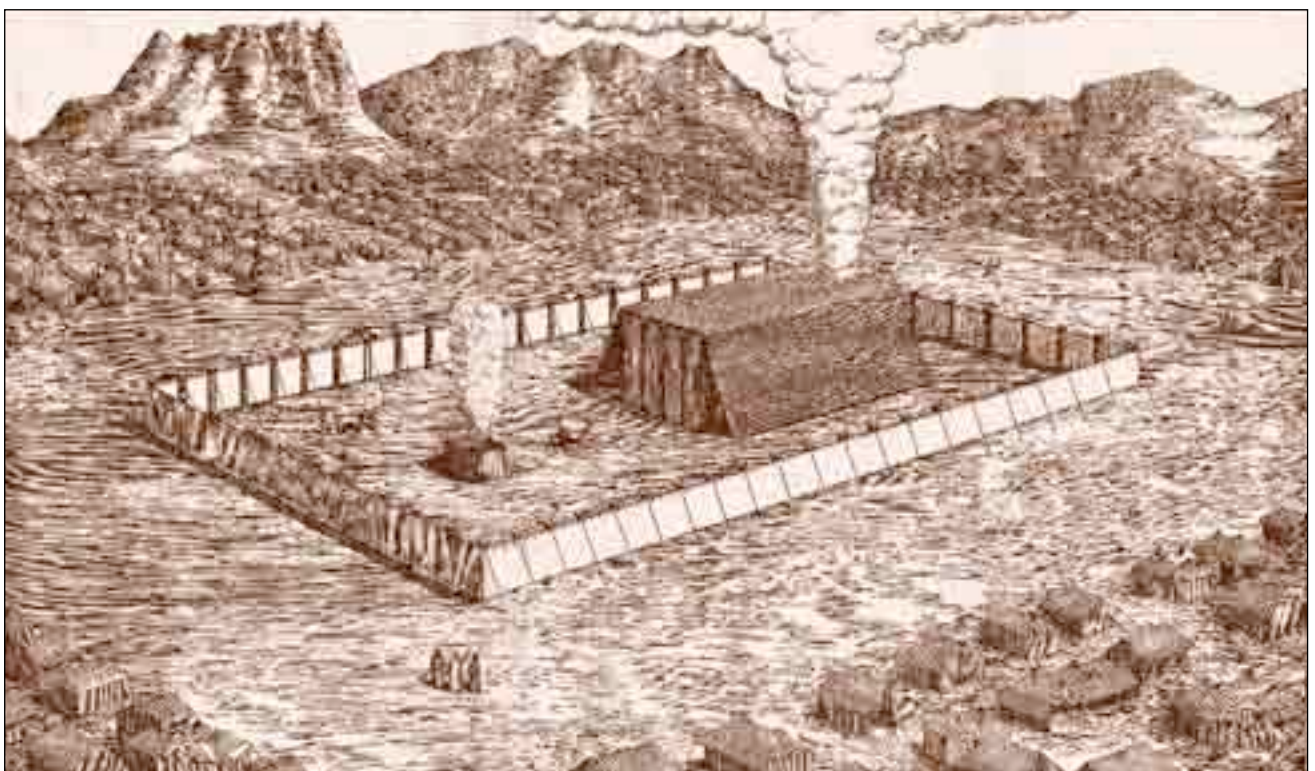
God, Gen. 17. 1. Note that John humbly uses the pronoun '**we**' throughout. These principles are fundamental and apply universally – even to apostles!

Apparently, some of John's opponents were claiming fellowship with God, yet they had little concern about their behaviour denying the seriousness of sin. Evidently, therefore, they belonged to the environment of sin and darkness, and their claims were bogus. We must beware that merely being orthodox in doctrine is no substitute for God-honouring behaviour, Matt. 7. 16.

Verse 7. But on what *condition* can we dwell in God's searching light? '**If we walk** (an ongoing, continuous experience) . . . **we have fellowship with one another** (i.e., with fellow believers similarly in fellowship with God) . . . **and the blood of Jesus Christ¹³ His Son cleanses us from all sin**'. That is, the believer is cleansed from the defilement and pollution of sin on the basis of the permanent value of the sacrifice of Christ, cp. Heb. 9. 14. Those in darkness have no access to these purifying benefits.

Bread of the Presence, Ex. 25. 30 ESV (or 'Shewbread', KJV): God and man 'feed' on the same bread, Lev. 24. 1-9. In order to eat, the priests must come into the holy place, *into the light* - the normal sphere for their activities. We too must come and walk in the light; it is not an issue of *how well* we walk, but *where* we walk.

Some opponents may have believed that they had matured spiritually to the point where they need no longer be concerned about holiness –



they denied their sinfulness and thus they saw no need for cleansing, v. 8! Not only did they not practice the truth, v. 6, the truth itself is **'not in them'**, cp. John 8. 44.

On the other hand, we do *not* need to be sinless in order to walk in the light, but instead must be willing to recognize and **'confess'** our sins which will inevitably be exposed.¹⁴ By contrast with verse 8, **'If we confess'**, v. 9, He is **'faithful and just (righteous) to forgive us our sins (those confessed) and cleanse us from all unrighteousness'**, compare 5. 17. 'He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy', Prov. 28. 13. Note that confession is much more than some vague blanket acknowledgement that we have sinned! To confess means, literally, 'to say the same thing', i.e., agree with God against ourselves. It is specific, directed to God, and is evidence of sincerity.

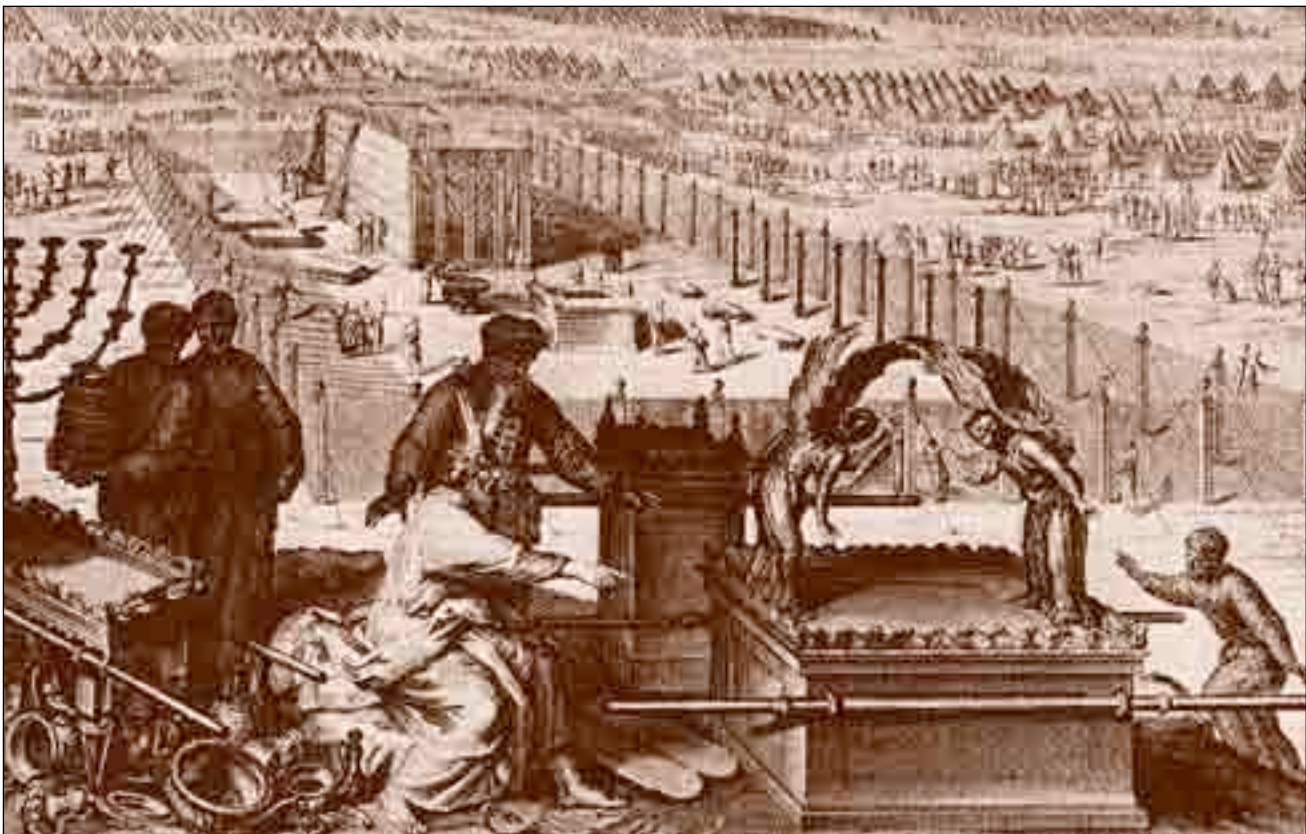
Verse 10, 'if we say we have not sinned' presents a most daring and outrageous position!¹⁵ Such a claim contradicts the consistent testimony of scripture, Rom 3. 23. To make God out to be a **'liar'** is much worse than lying, v. 6, or self-deception, v. 8. **'His word is not in us'** implies that the gospel has never been appropriated and so cannot govern the life – a sure mark of remaining in unbelief, cp. John 5. 38; 8. 37. In contrast with verses 6 and 8, John offers *no remedy* for such a position, since it displays rebellion against God and His word.

Endnotes

- 1 BRUCE, FREDERICK. F., *The Epistles of John*. London: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., 1970, p. 34.
- 2 See 1 John 1. 1, 2; 2. 25; 3. 14, 15; 5. 11, 12, 13,

16, 20.

- 3 See 1. 1; 2. 7 (2t), 13, 14, 24 (2t); 3. 8, 11.
- 4 The first two verbs, 'heard', 'seen', are in the perfect tense signifying the abiding result of a past action.
- 5 In the Greek these verbs are in the aorist tense.
- 6 'The tacit reference [to the Lord's resurrection] is the more worthy of notice because St. John does not mention the fact of the Resurrection in his epistle', B. F. WESTCOTT.
- 7 Manifested' is a favourite word of John's, occurring 9 times in the Gospel and 9 times in 1 John.
- 8 The repetition of the preposition 'with' points to the *distinct Persons* of the Godhead, and, incidentally, the full *equality* of the Son with the Father.
- 9 The test 'is largely directed against the Gnostic doctrine that to the man of enlightenment all conduct is morally indifferent', A. PLUMMER.
- 10 See John 8. 31, 32; 12. 35, 36.
- 11 'Those whose fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ will in their lives reflect the character of God; they will "walk as children of light"', F. F. BRUCE.
- 12 'The cycle of the epistle largely consists of progress from one opposite to another', A. PLUMMER, p. 48. See also John's Gospel for other instances of dualism.
- 13 Critical texts here omit 'Christ' on good authority. 'Jesus' points to his life and death here as a real man, while 'His Son' underlines the fact of His deity as the incarnate Son of God. 'This assertion of His dual nature repudiates the Gnostic denials of the reality of the incarnation', (D. E. HIEBERT).
- 14 In an absolute sense, the believer has received forgiveness and deliverance from the guilt of sins once for all on the basis of the death of Christ, 1 John 2. 12. He is now in the family of God, and can never be disowned. Yet if he now sins, it is a serious matter: his fellowship with the Father is thereby impaired and needs to be restored by confession. He remains saved, but needs to be restored to the full enjoyment of fellowship with God.
- 15 A. PLUMMER observes, 'Those who deny their sinnership charge God with framing a vast libel on human nature'.



RIVERSIDE GOSPEL HALL, BANDON, CO. CORK, IRELAND – A HISTORY

The assembly at Riverside Gospel Hall has a long history in the town of Bandon in Southern Ireland. In the years 1830 to 1840 there was an Episcopal curate in the parish of Bandon named George Bellett.

It is recorded that through the 'clear expositions of the truth propounded from the pulpit by George Bellett', there began a work in the consciences of many to whom he ministered; and although Mr. Bellett never left the Episcopal Church, a good number of those 'whom he led into the light and liberty of scriptural truth' and who saw the truth of 'gathering unto the name of the Lord Jesus Christ alone' separated themselves from Mr. Bellett and the denomination. Thus began the story of the local church that meets in Riverside Gospel Hall today.

About this time a movement had gathered pace in Ireland and elsewhere, when many students of the Bible began to realize that organized religion had wandered very far away from the New Testament teaching about how a local church should gather and be administered, and that the truth of the gospel had in many instances been lost. One of those men was a brother of Mr. Bellett, Mr. John G. Bellett and he is universally accepted as one of the earliest Irish exponents of the rediscovered truths of the simplicity of a New Testament church.

The first records of this new assembly in Bandon go back a long way. An old assembly pass-book recounts the expenses for rent, coal and other commodities, with its first entry falling under the date of 1843. During what is known as the Kerry revival which commenced in the mid 1860's preachers from there visited the assembly in Bandon and while most of the first generation of believers had passed away leaving a much smaller number, through the preaching of these visiting brethren, under the blessing of God many more were saved, baptized, and added to the fellowship.

A well known preacher of the time – Dr. S. P. Tregelles, a distinguished Bible scholar also encouraged the assembly by his visits. In the 1870s and onwards many more distinguished Bible teachers visited

including Mr. F.C. Bland, Mr. Richard Mahoney, Sir Robert Anderson and many others too numerous to mention. Such gifted men helped to stimulate and build up the little assembly for the glory of God. Many of the meetings were held in the Town Hall and a wide circle of people were reached and saved. Down through the years since those early days God has had His watchful eye on the assembly, keeping and preserving it from many an attack by Satan.

Many of the meetings were held in private rooms, hotel rooms, and as mentioned above in the Town Hall. The Sunday school, which commenced very early in the assembly's history, was carried on in the ballroom of one of the hotels.

The number of children attending the Sunday school at that time fluctuated between fifty and ninety, and in the 1900s the same pattern followed but numbers at times exceeded the one hundred mark. Looking at the records it can be seen that a number of students came every Sunday of the year, never missing a Sunday for years on end. In fact there is a lady now in her seventies currently living in Watergate Street, Bandon, who for fourteen years never missed one single Sunday and had to walk one mile there and back, and in those days Sunday school was held on all fifty-two Sundays of the year, except when Christmas day fell on a Sunday!

In early 1893 a building was gifted to the assembly for its activities, this building became to be known as Bridge Place Hall. This hall (converted into flats today) is prominently situated on the Bridge in Bandon. The new hall was opened by a series of gospel meetings. Series of meetings for the teaching of the scriptures, for the preaching of the gospel, and special children's

meetings have always been a feature of the activities of the assembly.

Many missionaries have visited over the years from the four corners of the earth, and there has always been a great interest amongst the believers in overseas missionary work.

In the 1960s the Presbyterian Church just across the way from Bridge Place Hall, was closed and put up for sale and the elders of the assembly at the time decided to purchase it for the assembly. Bridge Place Hall was sold and the name Riverside Hall was decided upon for the 'new' building. The assembly moved to this new venue and met there for the first time for the Lord's Supper on Sunday August 9th 1964. On the day before, the 8th of August, the first wedding was celebrated in the new building. Up until that time all assembly weddings were held in Cork Gospel Hall, as Bridge Place Hall was not suitable for such occasions. Over time this building became a liability for the assembly, as it was in need of major remedial works. And so again a move was decided upon. This time a site was purchased in Allen Square, and building work commenced in 1997. The work was completed on the 5th of July 1999 and a beautiful new Hall was opened.

So, for over 150 years a testimony has been maintained and today activities include Sunday School, preaching of the gospel, distribution of scripture calendars to every home in the town over the Christmas period. The assembly also rents prominent roadside advertising hoardings to display scripture verses at Christmas, and the vision of the early brethren continues to be the focus, that is to 'continue steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread, and in prayers', Acts 2, 42.

www.riversidegospelhall.com



The new Riverside Gospel Hall



APOLLOS

When Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria in Egypt, turned up at the synagogue at Ephesus, he made quite an impression with his speaking. As far as it went, his teaching was very good, being marked by eloquence, great scripture knowledge, fervency and exactness, Acts 18. 24-25. Coming from Alexandria, he would have had a very good educational background and his ability in speaking well was not surprising. However, what was surprising was that his teaching followed that of John the Baptist. It seems that the message of John was well known throughout the Jewish world, for not only did Apollos from Alexandria know about it, but so did a dozen Jews in Ephesus whom Paul met later, Acts 19. 1-7. They are described as 'disciples', but like many who heard John at an early stage, believed in One who was still coming, as he said, 'There cometh one mightier than I after me', Mark 1. 7. It is not difficult to imagine that whoever had influenced Apollos heard the teaching of John anticipating the coming of the Lord Jesus; had been baptised; whose life had been changed and who had then left the country and heard no more about the Lord Jesus. It is amazing that such was the strong impression that John had, that all these years later and all these miles away, his message lived on.

Among those who heard Apollos were Aquila and Priscilla, believers who had stayed behind in Ephesus when the apostle Paul moved on, Acts 18. 19. They took a special interest in Apollos and they did for him what Paul would do for the dozen described later in Acts 19, in that they brought them up to date with the full gospel message of Christ, His ministry, crucifixion and resurrection. Private tuition in their home allowed Priscilla the freedom to pass on what she knew, albeit in conjunction with her husband. Of course, in the assembly meetings she would have remained silent, 1 Cor. 14. 34. As one has said, you do not have to be an evangelist to evangelize! Aquila and Priscilla would have had to be patient with Apollos, realizing his limitations, but seeing his potential. WILLIAM KELLY said, 'How lamentable to despise

Personalities in the Past Those who were devoted

those today who are where we were yesterday'. Apollos' original preaching was diligent, i.e., accurate, but after Aquila and Priscilla taught him he spoke with more accuracy, Acts 18. 26.

Apollos moved on to Achaia (Corinth and district), armed with a letter of commendation from the believers at Ephesus. In Achaia he put to good use the teaching of Aquila and Priscilla and first 'helped them much which had believed through grace', v. 27, then 'he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ', v. 28. This work of Apollos was fully acknowledged by the apostle Paul, who, writing to the Corinthians later, said, first concerning the gospel, that he and Apollos were 'ministers by whom ye believed', 1 Cor. 3. 5, then, second, that he had planted the assembly, Apollos had later watered it, as it was pictured as God's cultivated field, 1 Cor. 3. 6-9.

Some time afterwards, Apollos must have returned to Ephesus. We can surmise this from the fact that when Paul wrote to the Corinthians Apollos was either with him or nearby, since he had been consulted by Paul about the possibility of him going to Corinth. Apollos was probably as horrified as Paul to have heard of factions in the assembly at Corinth associating themselves with their particular names, 1 Cor. 3. 4-5. To hear that believers said 'I am of Apollos' was no object of pride and joy, rather the opposite. Paul wanted him to go to Corinth to help correct this matter, having already sent Timothy to Macedonia, with the possibility that he might then go down to Corinth.¹ Also, he wrote a letter to Corinth and sent it directly by Titus and another brother, 2 Cor. 12. 18, and he very much wanted Apollos to go with them. In fact, he had 'begged him much that he would go to you with the brethren, but it was not at all his will to go now', but when he felt it was the right time, he promised that he would go

to Corinth, 1 Cor. 16. 12 JND. This demonstrates a number of principles. First, that even though he was an apostle, Paul would not overrule Apollos' personal responsibility to the Lord and exercise in the matter of service.² Second, we see that Apollos had the same long-term strategic aim as Paul, but his view of the correct short-term tactics was different. Brethren today should consider one another in this respect, for there can be diversity with unity. Third, Paul was man enough to admit publically that Apollos did not agree with him!

Paul urged the Corinthians to realize that he and Apollos were not to be put on pedestals, but to be seen as servants, who belonged to them and not the other way around, so they were saying 'I am of Apollos', but rather that he belonged to them, see 1 Cor. 3. 22. They had to learn 'not to think of men above that which is written', v. 6. Reading Paul's second letter to the Corinthians gives us the strong impression that this teaching was generally accepted.

The last mention we have of Apollos is some years later in connection with Titus on the island of Crete. When Titus was to leave Crete and join Paul at Nicopolis, he was instructed to 'bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them', Tit. 3. 13. Paul's request shows that Paul acknowledged the special usefulness of Apollos to him and Titus was to relieve him of any concern with regard to travelling. No doubt Apollos had been helpful in Crete and would be missed there, since there were many problems with Jews, Tit. 1. 14; 3. 9.

Apollos was Martin Luther's – and others' – candidate for the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. Of course, we cannot prove conclusively if it were he, Paul or anyone else for that matter. However, there can be little argument that he *could* have been, given his gift and ability.



Moral Epistles (7)

, dutiful and dear to Paul

By **HOWARD BARNES**
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In summary, we can say that Apollos was very useful in the service of the Lord, making the best of his background and capabilities. Most of all, perhaps, was his use of the Old Testament. Today we need more teachers with an accurate knowledge of these parts of the scriptures. Although we might not all have the eloquence of Apollos, we can all spend enough time to become mighty in the scriptures.

ZENAS

This brother was a lawyer by profession, whom (along with Apollos) Paul knew to be with Titus in Crete, Tit. 3. 13. Paul tells Titus to bring them (literally: send them forward) presumably to Nicopolis for the winter and to see to all their travel requirements. We do not know if he was a lawyer qualified in Jewish or Roman law, either might have been of use in preparing his legal case. However, we do not know if he was expecting a trial at that point.

MARK

(John, John surnamed Mark, Marcus)
Mark's full name was John Mark; a common Jewish name (John) linked to a common Roman name

(Marcus). He is first introduced to us in Acts chapter 12, where we find he lived with his well-to-do family in Jerusalem, see v. 12. His mother, Mary, owned a large house in Jerusalem where the believers gathered and she had a servant girl named Rhoda. It appears that he may have come to know and believe the gospel through Peter, for Peter later called him 'my son', 1 Pet. 5. 13. Barnabas, an uncle of Mark's, Col. 4. 10, and Paul took him with them from Jerusalem to Antioch in Syria, Acts 11. 25. He then accompanied Paul and Barnabas on Paul's first missionary journey, Acts 13. 4-5; Shortly afterwards, however, he left them in Pamphylia to return to Jerusalem, v. 13. We do not know the reason for his defection. When Paul and Barnabas later prepared to make their second missionary journey, Barnabas was keen to take Mark along, but Paul strongly disagreed. They then parted company and Barnabas took Mark and sailed to his home in Cyprus. Paul took Silas (Silvanus) and travelled over-land through Syria and Cilicia *en route* to Galatia, Acts 15. 36 - 16. 11, where Timothy joined them.

However, John Mark continued in the Lord's work. It appears that he was active in provinces of Pontus, Galatia,

Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. This would seem to be the case because, when Peter wrote his first letter to the [Jewish] Christians in these areas, he included a greeting to them from his 'son' Mark, 1 Pet. 5. 13. This would suggest the Christians in these areas knew Mark personally. His work in these regions is further suggested by Paul's including a greeting from Mark (Marcus) to the Christians in Colosse, with the added note that they had received instructions regarding Mark and that they should welcome him if he came to them, Col. 4. 10. Paul also included a personal greeting from Mark to Philemon, who was a member of the assembly at Colosse, see Philem. 24. These latter references show that Mark was in Rome and on good terms with him.

During Paul's second Roman imprisonment, and not long before his martyrdom, Paul requested that Timothy, who was in or near Ephesus in Asia, should bring Mark with him to Rome. Paul wanted Mark with him there, because Mark was of 'useful' service to him, 2 Tim. 4. 11.

The greetings from Mark in Paul's letters and Paul's request for Timothy to bring Mark with him to Rome clarify for us that whatever grievance Paul had had with Mark was cleared up and forgiven. He also spoke warmly of Barnabas, 1 Cor. 9. 6, quite some time after their disagreement.

Mark was the faltering servant who was used, in the Gospel that bears his name, to describe the faithful servant, the Lord Jesus Christ. This shows us that early failure can be overcome and eventually usefulness can be known. Paul's final hours would have been made more bearable by the presence of both Mark and Timothy.

Endnotes

- 1 Actually, he does not appear to have turned up, Acts 19. 22; 1 Cor. 4. 17; 16. 10, cp. 2 Cor. 1. 1.
- 2 As J. N. DARBY said, 'Free in his movements, he would act according to the judgment which the Lord would enable him to form', 'Synopsis' on 1 Corinthians 16.

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The school of pain

By **SAM TAUFEEK** Toronto, Canada

Although no one dares to apply to it, all believers have still been through this school at one level or another. The wisdom and grace of God permitted that our family would go through the pain of the departure of my only daughter at the age of fourteen-and-a-half and after battling cancer for about seventeen months. She is now enjoying the presence of her Redeemer whom she trusted for her salvation. Those who have to go through such an experience know the amount of associated pain, especially of the parents. All the saints around us tried their best to support and comfort us. Many would say that they can not even start to imagine what we were going through and a few would say, 'We know what you are going through, we have been there'. Although I greatly appreciated the support of all, there was always a tender spot in our hearts for those who had experienced similar pain. It was easier to listen to them while sharing their thoughts. This experience helped me to understand better what Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 3-6.

Let us examine these verses closely:

'Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort', 2 Cor. 1. 3. These are the attributes of God that we need to remember and dwell upon in our tribulation to draw patience and endurance.

'Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God', v. 4 [my emphasis]. Paul did see another dimension and a new purpose in his trouble. It is to teach him how to comfort others who are going through similar trouble. This is clear in verse 6.

'And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation,

which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation', v. 6 [my emphasis]. But did Paul go through 'all' sorts of tribulation and was he capable or qualified to relate to 'any trouble'? There is no doubt that Paul is speaking here in regard to the sufferings of the saints for the sake of Jesus' name. 'For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ', v. 5. Paul experienced such afflictions and perhaps to a much higher magnitude, 'in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft', 11. 23.

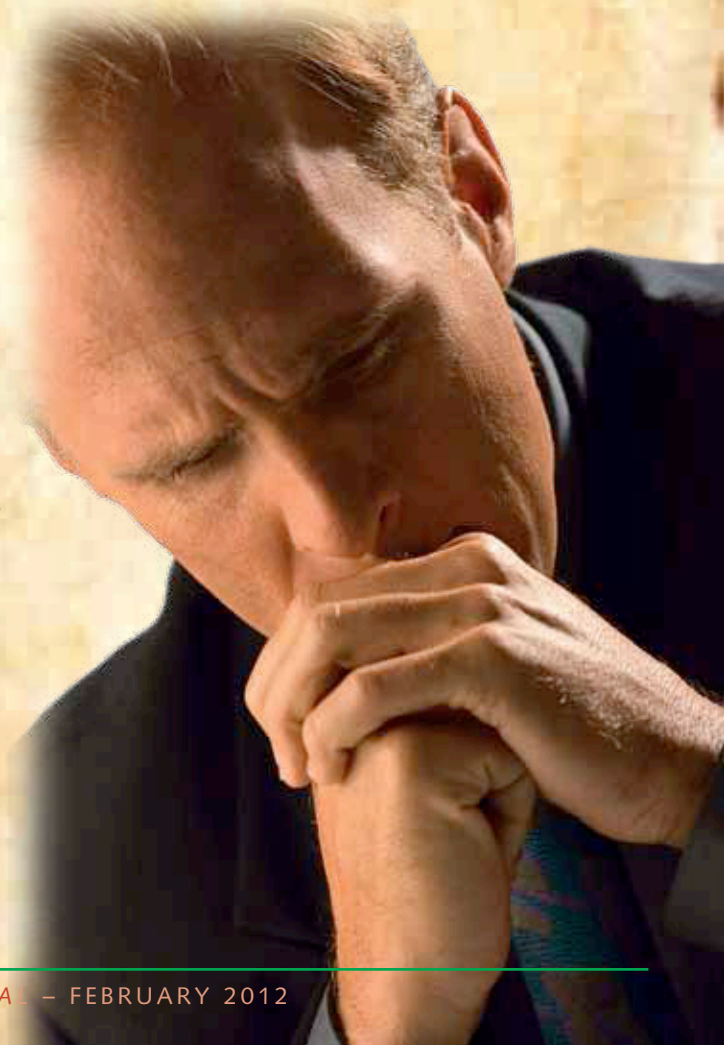
But let us now 'look unto Jesus'. Who, other than the Lord Jesus, could tell the believers, in His address to the seven churches in Revelation, 'I know'? This is a very short statement that speaks volumes to us. What a comforting truth for every believer going through trouble! None but He 'was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin', Heb. 4. 15, also, 'For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted', Heb. 2. 18. I did not have any choice in my pain but I would like to continuously remind myself that the Lord Jesus had a choice but His love was greater than any pain He had to endure for us.

'Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator', 1 Pet. 4. 19. The word 'commit' carries the meaning, 'to deposit in trust for

protection' or simply to trust. He is able to keep that which you have committed unto him against that day. He knows exactly what you are going through because He is 'a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief' but, also, He knows how to speak a word in season to him that is weary. He told Hezekiah, 'I have seen thy tears', Isa. 38. 5, and in the days of His flesh was identified by strong crying and tears.

Finally, in the last chapter of the last book in the Bible we read, 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away', Rev. 21. 4. It is not uncommon to run out of words when facing a brother or a sister who is going through trouble we have never experienced. That's the time when listening would be more effectual than speaking. Let us lift them up and commit them to the only One who can comfort them - the Man of Calvary!

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In most of Christendom there is a clergy system firmly entrenched. The clergy are a special class in the church, men or women who go to seminary for special training, are ordained and then become leaders in the churches. They preach, baptize, officiate at various services and perform marriages. Because of their training and position they are viewed as professionals and are given special titles such as 'Bishop', 'Reverend', or 'Pastor'. They are viewed as the spiritual leaders of their congregations.

Those who attempt to get back to a more scriptural position deny a clergy-laity division of God's people. The Lord warned against a similar mentality amongst the Pharisees, Matt. 23. 6-12. He levelled all Christians to the status of being brothers and sisters, a family relationship. In the first century those who were called of God to this ministry delighted to call themselves 'servants of God', emphasizing their relationship to God and to His people. Today, those who seek a simpler, scriptural pathway of service prefer to be called 'the Lord's servants' or 'servants of God'.

The word *doulos* actually means a slave. Many translations do not like to use that term but translate 'servant' or, perhaps, 'bondservant', Rom. 1. 1 NKJV. Perhaps this is because the word 'slave' seems so degrading, reminding one of taskmasters wielding the whip. In the ancient world slavery was very common. It is said that half of Rome's population was made up of slaves. The word *diakonos* also translated 'servant' or 'deacon' emphasizes the work, rather than the relationship to the master.

The slave was always reminded that he was owned by another. Israel was redeemed from the slavery of Egypt and became God's people, His own special possession. They entered into a covenant relationship with God and promised to obey Him, Exod. 24. 6-8. The church today has been redeemed from the slavery of sin and entered into a covenant relationship with the Lord. Believers are redeemed 'with the precious blood of Christ', 1 Pet. 1. 19, and are His special people, 1 Pet. 2. 9. All of the saints are 'slaves' of Christ

The Servants of God

By
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by redemption. Paul pleads, 'For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's', 1 Cor. 6. 20.

The one who is called by God to the work of teaching and preaching His word can say with the apostles, 'We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word', Acts 6. 4. He delights to be a slave of God. As such his master is obligated to defend him and to provide for his needs. There was real security in being a slave. The Lord's slave can claim His protection and provision. Elijah, the prophet, was fed by the brook by ravens and then later cared for by a widow, 1 Kgs. 17.

Slaves were never for hire. They served at the bidding of their owner, no one else. The clergy system, with its hired preachers, is a curse in the churches today. New Testament preachers were supported by the gifts of God's people; they were never hired. Paul was fearless in confronting the Galatian churches with their legalism in going back to Judaism. 'For do I now persuade men or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I should not be the bondservant (*doulos*) of Christ', Gal. 1. 10.

It is a great privilege to serve the Lord in proclaiming His word. In old age Paul could say, 'And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry', 1 Tim. 1. 12. But it must be the call of God; He calls and equips His servants. Such men will be keenly conscious of God's call and that they are the slaves of God. They will be fearless with ministry that probes the conscience and exalts Jesus Christ as Lord of all. They will not be men pleasers but will be focused on pleasing the Lord. Oh God, raise up such men today!

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Last year was the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version (AV) which, in many places, is rarely matched in terms of the beauty of its language. In these two articles an effort has been made to define some principles which might help to answer the question: which translation might we use? In the first article, published in the November 2011 magazine, the question of the underlying text used was discussed. In this article, this is considered further together with the method or mode of translation.

1) The original text to be used

Two Crucial Paragraphs

Apart from many other omissions and differences¹ there are two complete paragraphs which are undermined in the 'NU' (see previous article for explanation) text. Many modern versions set these two paragraphs aside to show that the translators or editors reject or question them. Since both are of real theological significance, and both are included in the KJV and the NKJV as part of the sacred text, an explanation is in order.

Mark 16. 9-20

In leaving out these verses the marginal notes often state, 'Some of the oldest manuscripts omit these verses'. However this should really read, 'Just two early manuscripts and one much later one omit'. The note in the New International Version (NIV) is more accurate as to the number of manuscripts, but it is, however, highly interpretive, viz: 'The two most *reliable* early manuscripts do not have Mark 16. 9-20'. However, the reliability of Vaticanus and Sinaiticus is, as we have already mentioned in the first article, strictly theory, though unfortunately widely taught as fact. To add to this controversy, the Vaticanus contains a space for the missing paragraph, a very unusual thing considering the expensive writing materials of that day. The Sinaiticus manuscript also shows evidence of having been tampered with to fill up the space. It has been stated that the style of Mark chapter 16 verses 9-20 is unlike Mark's. However this is subjective, as there are, for instance, stylistic parallels between Mark chapters 1 and 16. Chapter

The King James Version and

16 verse 8 (where the two minority manuscripts close) ends with the little word *gar* ('for' in Greek), which is highly unusual. To end a book with this word seems most unlikely. If one accepts the theory that Mark is the oldest Gospel, it would seem strange that it includes the resurrection story but ends without the risen Christ actually appearing! The footnotes in modern translations often fail to report that some 1,400 manuscripts do contain this passage. Furthermore, Jerome, when he translated the New Testament into Latin, included it. It is significant that he did so in the fourth century, when the dissenting Egyptian manuscripts were also written! Apparently these two copies, which lack this passage, were not representative in their own time! To conclude, the long ending of Mark has a firm textual foundation. It would seem to many that this omission alone is a sufficient basis to entirely reject the evidence of the two earliest manuscripts.

The Adulterous Woman Forgiven—John 7. 53—8. 11

Over nine hundred manuscripts support this passage though not as many as for Mark chapter 16. An NIV marginal note says, 'The earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not have John 7. 53 – 8. 11'. Let it be emphasized again that the earliest Greek copies of John – i.e., those from Egypt – though they lack this text, are not, as stated previously, necessarily superior. Augustine wrote that the paragraph may have been removed for fear it would promote immorality. In fact, the Lord upheld the law by first turning the heat of Sinai on the woman's accusers, then telling the woman to cease from her sin. The argument that the style is not like John's is subjective and has been well answered.² Perhaps the best way for the Bible reader to test the passage is to read John chapter 7 verse 52, skip over the verses from chapter 7 verse 53 to chapter 8 verse 11, to chapter 8 verse 12. It is clear that verse 12 does not connect. The NIV obscures this anomaly by supplying the word 'people' to the text of chapter 8 verse 12. But every Greek text says 'them' and if chapter 7 verse 53 were the verse right before it, the 'them' would refer to the meeting of Nicodemus

and the Sanhedrin where the Lord was not present!

A Scientifically Impossible Eclipse

There is a scientific error in the Critical Text (for explanation see first article) for Luke chapter 23 verse 45. The overwhelming majority of manuscripts support the 'TR' or Majority text that 'the sun was darkened' (Gk. *eskotisthe*). The ancient Egyptian manuscripts, however, read 'the sun being eclipsed' (Gk. *eklipontos*). This is an astronomical impossibility as Christ's death took place at Passover when the moon was full, i.e., positioned behind the earth in relation to the sun and therefore it could not simultaneously be in an eclipse position! God caused the sun to be 'darkened' by means not disclosed. As ISAAC WATTS penned:

*Well might the sun in darkness hide
And shut his glories in
When Christ,
the Incarnate Maker, died
For man His creature's sin.*

Now we need to address the second important foundation of reliable translations.

2) The mode or method of Translation

Literal Translation

The oldest and most traditional method of translation seeks to follow the structure and wording of the original language wherever the receptor language allows, and to be more free and idiomatic where a literal rendering would be misleading or confusing. Nearly all of the famous versions of Judeo - Christian history fall into this category: the Septuagint, the Vulgate, Luther's German Bible, Tyndale and its revisions, down to the KJV and its later revisions. Some of these revisions such as the English Revised Version of 1885 (RV) and the U.S. counterpart, the American Standard Version of 1901 (ASV), go too far in their literal renderings. They have been rightly criticized for being too rigid in this respect.

Paraphrase

A paraphrase, e.g., The Good News Bible or The Contemporary English Version, takes great liberties in word



Principles of Translation (2)

order: adding words and phrases, rewriting, and altering the style without informing the reader which words have been added or taken away. Because of this freedom of rendering, the translator often inserts his own interpretations into the text. These insertions are not highlighted and therefore the reader is left with no way of telling what was in the original text.

Expanded Translation

Since many words can have more than one meaning, and Greek words often have subtle shades of meaning that are difficult to transmit in a strictly literal translation, some translators seek to insert extra words, explanatory comments, and paraphrases of verb tenses. WUEST's Expanded Translation and the Amplified Bible are popular examples of this method. While it is true that many words can have a number of meanings when they appear in a list, when these are in context, the meaning of a word is generally pinned down more closely. These translations are actually running commentaries, the author's interpretation and not strictly a translation. Expanded translations can lead to readers being unable to distinguish what part of the translation comes from the original language, and what part comes from the translator. The multiplicity of meanings could lead to doctrinal error.

Dynamic Equivalence

To be fair, the ideals of the Dynamic Equivalence³ method are high; namely, to produce in the reader or hearer of the receptor language the same reaction to the message that the original author sought to produce in the immediate readers or listeners. Those who seek dynamic equivalence in translation attempt to produce in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the message contained in the source language, keeping in mind both the meaning and the style. They recognize, of course, that no translation can succeed one hundred per cent. The problem with dynamic equivalence is the area of subjectivity in the transfer of information to the receptor language. As in an ordinary paraphrase, there is too much opportunity to introduce interpretive material into the receptor language. Another problem is that

words added are again not italicised as is the case in the KJV and NKJV, and so the reader cannot determine what is and what is not in the original text, e.g., 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 9, where the NIV adds the words 'of the procession', 'in the arena', and 'whole'. The Bible contains difficult doctrinal discussions, and there is real danger using this method of inserting what the translator believes rather than what the original text says.

Complete equivalence

This is basically the literal method updated to include scientific insights from linguistic analysis. To the extent that modern usage allows, a complete equivalence translation of such a book as the Bible will reflect as much of the original as possible.⁴

To summarize, a great deal of the information contained in a phrase, clause, or paragraph is encoded in its syntax. Translations that do not produce structural equivalence as well as semantic equivalence have failed to reproduce important information.

Conclusion

To conclude, a growing number of scholars believe that God has preserved His word in the consensus of the majority of manuscripts. It is vital that we take our part in the chain of teaching, as laid out by Paul: Paul, then Timothy, then faithful men, and finally others also, 2 Tim. 2. 2, i.e., right down to us of the present generation! We need to hold fast the form (Gk. essence) of sound words. We should care even about the 'jots and tittles', even where they may not affect any doctrine, Matt. 5. 18. There is a need for us to make an intelligent and informed judgement about these matters rather than leaving them to scholars who may or may not be true believers.

An important question to ask is: 'Would God inspire a written revelation, then allow it to be partially lost, then allow it to be recovered some eighteen or so centuries later, and then even later to be corrected in stages?' Surely, the answer must be negative, though this is apparently what many critical scholars would have us believe. It is submitted that the Lord, who inspired men to write His precious word, would providentially preserve it as

well. Reference here is made to what the Lord Himself said, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away', Matt. 24. 35. Though many do not go along with this view, I believe that, even as the Lord promised to preserve His word, He has carried out this preservation and that this is contained in the majority of manuscripts.⁵

Those responsible for new versions often claim that their version is a more accurate translation of the original than previous ones. Which version should we choose? How can we discern which is the most accurate? To conclude, it is my view that it is safest and best to use one that is based on the majority of manuscripts and which uses the complete equivalence translation method. The only two English translations which pass *both* of these tests at present are the KJV and NKJV.⁶

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- DEAN BURGON, *Revision Revised*, last published by Conservative Classics.
EDWARD HILLS, *The KJV Defended*, Christian Research Press.
ARTHUR L. FARSTAD, *The New King James Version - In the Great Tradition*, Thos. Nelson.
The Newberry Bible which gives textual authorities for/against inclusion/omission in footnotes.
Z. C. HODGES, *The Greek text of the King James Version*.

Endnotes

- For further information refer to Bible version comparison charts at <http://av1611.com/kjbp/>
- Z. C. HODGES, *The Greek text of the King James Version*
- See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dynamic_and_formal_equivalence for a more detailed definition
- At internet address http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dynamic_and_formal_equivalence there is a brief list of which category into which the different translations fall.
- Concerning the majority reading two further Majority Texts were published in the late 1980's/early 1990's, using the latest manuscript evidence; both correspond very closely with the TR and confirm its reliability. There is a brief explanation of this at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/majority.html>.
- Many marginal notes in the various editions of the NKJV refer to NU text readings – as indeed would be the case with versions of the KJV, e.g., the Newberry Bible. However, care should be taken when comments such as 'the *best* or *most reliable* manuscripts read' as this is subjective. As discussed previously, they are not necessarily the best manuscripts just because they are the earliest.

HOWARD COLES is treasurer of the Precious Seed Trust.



The doctrine of the sovereignty of God is one of the weightiest and most important doctrines of scripture. Although the word 'sovereignty' is never used in the English Bible, other synonyms such as 'majesty', 'almighty', and 'greatness' are used many times. God's sovereignty is expressed in one way or another on nearly every page of the Bible. In describing the sovereignty of God it has been said, 'God in His love wills what is best for us. In His wisdom He always knows what is best, and in His majesty He has the power to bring it about'. For some believers, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God is a difficult doctrine to embrace. They ask, 'Why did God give Peter 3,000 souls on the Day of Pentecost, while faithful Stephen received 3,000 stones?' It is in the difficult times of life that God tests our faith. Obeying God is worked out within well-defined boundaries of God's word, while trusting God is worked out in an arena that has no boundaries. This poses the question, 'How can we trust and love the sovereign God?' Surely the answer lies in knowing the character, attributes, and doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

Divine Sovereignty and the Attributes of God

The Bible presents God as both infinitely all-powerful and interminably

THE SOVEREIGNTY

good. God's goodness, justice, mercy, and His other attributes meet together to superintend His sovereign actions. God's sovereignty may sometimes involve testing in the form of calamity and trials, but never without love, faithfulness, and compassion. His sovereign will may appear for the moment to be without purpose, yet His ways are always perfect. He is a God whom we can trust, love, and worship for His sovereign will. While sovereignty is surely to be believed by all who love sound biblical doctrine, it must be understood that it is not to be exercised in conflict with God's attributes, such as love, justice, and immutability. Some have erred in this respect and have raised sovereignty to such a level that all other attributes of God have become secondary. The sovereignty of God is never exercised at the expense of His divine nature, which is love, 1 John 4. 8. Concerning this conflict, DR. JAMES ORR, general editor of the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, writes, 'Calvin exalts the sovereignty of God, and this is right, but errs in placing his root-ideas of God in the sovereign will rather than in love'.¹

Divine Sovereignty and the Goodness of God

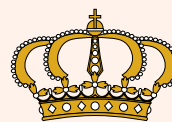
The biblical principle that God is good and does good applies to His sovereign actions. God's attributes and His purposes cannot be divorced; God will not act contrary to His holy nature. Scripture reveals that God's mercy, goodness, grace, and compassion all undergird His sovereign purposes and will. Abraham echoed this very principle when he said, 'Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?' Gen. 18. 25. Even when affliction and suffering are God's divine will, it too is ruled by His compassion and unfailing love. Jeremiah the prophet

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explained, 'Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men', Lam. 3. 32-33 NIV. Theologians have called this linking of God's sovereign rule with God's infinite goodness the doctrine of providence. Providence is His divine care and sovereign rule over creation for His glory and the good of man. God never pursues His glory at the expense of His people, nor does He ever seek our good at the expense of His glory. He has designed His eternal purpose so that His glory and our good are inseparably yoked together.

Divine Sovereignty and the Wisdom of God

All God's sovereign actions are also rooted in His infinite wisdom. God's wisdom enables Him to direct every act that occurs upon the world stage into a perfect plan that accomplishes His divine purpose. God is the master of every situation. Man can be frustrated by circumstances outside of his control, but this is never true of God. There is never a





(1) Introduction

situation or difficulty which can ever frustrate the wisdom of God. 'Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite', Ps. 147. 5. His ways are infinitely perfect. No act of God is flawed, marred, or suspect. No decision of God can ever be improved upon. We may not understand the ways of God, yet they remain rooted in perfect wisdom. It is not our place to raise doubts about the 'God only wise', but rather to bow in worship.

The Biblical Scope of Divine Sovereignty

The doctrine that God is sovereign is a truth that must be believed by all Christians. That God is sovereign means that He is the highest and greatest, exalted above all. He is omnipotent and controls everything, working everything according to His eternal plan and purpose, Eph. 1. 11. Since God is infinite, His rule must be absolute. His rule must involve total control of everything in His creation – every circumstance, every situation, every event. God's sovereignty means that He either directly causes or consciously permits all that happens. God claims full responsibility for establishing and removing human rulers. God, according to His holy character, has the right to do those things that please Him, Ps. 115. 3. God is in complete control, and yet He does not manipulate people like mere puppets. He gives them the dignity and freedom to make decisions and holds them responsible for their choices. Those decisions may bring to pass untold misery and suffering, yet God allows it. However, through this divine omniscience, God knows every choice that man will make, and through divine sovereignty He takes those choices and uses them to serve His purposes. In this way, God has complete control over every decision and action, and man has the freedom to make

decisions. However, where divine wisdom deems it best, He will overrule man's decisions in order to accomplish His own matchless purposes.

Divine Sovereignty and the Scope of Man's Free Will

Some have wrongly concluded that since God is absolutely sovereign, then man does not have a free will. Scripture emphasizes that God has sovereignly granted to man the ability to make free choices. This is not man usurping God's role in the world, but this *is* God's sovereign design for man. This principle is expressed by our Lord Himself in His interview with Pilate. Pilate charges the Lord, 'Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and have power to release you?' Jesus answers, 'You could have no power at all against me, unless it had been given you from above', John 19. 10-11 NKJV. Pilate thought that his ability to make free decisions was a personal right. Our Lord rightly corrects Pilate and states that the ability to make free choices is from God – 'it is given from above'. God exercises sovereign control in the world; but within this control, He permits certain events and purposes others. The word of God carefully sets forth both the infinite sovereignty of God and human responsibility. To detract from either of these truths is to detract from the fullness of the word of God. A proper biblical balance between the two must be rigorously sought and maintained. A. W. TOZER strikes a proper biblical balance, when he writes, 'God sovereignly decreed that man should be free to exercise moral choice, and man from the beginning has fulfilled that decree by making his choice between good and evil. When he chooses to do evil, he does not thereby countervail the sovereign will of God but fulfills it, inasmuch as the

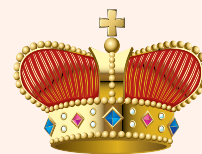
eternal decree decided not which choice the man should make but that he should be free to make it. If in His absolute freedom God has willed to give limited freedom, who is there to stay His hand or say, "What doest Thou?" Man's will is free because God is sovereign. A God less than sovereign could not bestow moral freedom upon His creatures. He would be afraid to do so'.² C. H. SPURGEON adds, 'Man is a free agent, a responsible agent, so that his sin is his own wilful sin and it lies fully with him and never with God, and yet at the same time God's purposes are fulfilled, and His will is done even by demons and corrupt men – I cannot comprehend it: without hesitation I believe it, and rejoice so to do, I never hope to comprehend it . . . I worship a God I never expect to comprehend'.³

Finally, the doctrine of the sovereignty of God must never provide man with excuses. For no man can deny full responsibility for his actions by claiming that he was irresistibly led by God; God never does violence to the free will. God's sovereignty and man's freedom dwell side by side in such a way that the former does not force itself upon the latter. How can this be brought to pass? It is only by and through a sovereign God who is characterized by infinite power, wisdom, love, and goodness.

Endnotes

- 1 JAMES ORR, *The Progress of Dogma*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952, pg. 292.
- 2 A. W. TOZER, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishers, 1961, pg. 118.
- 3 C. H. SPURGEON, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 16, London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1907, pg. 501.

DAVID DUNLAP has served the Lord for over twenty-five years first as a missionary, and now is engaged in a writing and Bible teaching ministry in North America. He is the author of four books, the most recent being *The Glory of the Ages*. He was commended to the Lord's work in 1983 by Bethel Bible Chapel in Middletown, NJ.





The Reward Side of Christianity

By **ERIC G. PARMENTER** Ynysybwl, Wales

On his office wall a brother had this motto – 'Counted Faithful'. The same brother wrote,

All my work is for the Master,
He is still my heart's desire,
Oh that He may count me faithful
In the day that tries by fire.

The New Testament speaks of various crowns as figures of speech for rewards at the judgement seat of Christ.

The Crown of Life

This is a reward twice mentioned for martyrdom, first by James. He writes 'Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him', Jas. 1. 12. The Lord, in writing to the church at Smyrna, said to the believers facing persecution and possible death, 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life', Rev. 2. 10.

The Crown of Glory

This is a word to the assembly elders, 'When the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away', 1 Pet. 5. 2-4. Where elders have been faithful to the charge that God has given them, if they feed the flock and not themselves, the Lord will give them a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

Satan hates all faithful shepherds and will do all that is possible to turn them aside. To serve to please men is not to be the servant of Christ. The reward is not for those who serve for 'filthy lucre', nor for those who would 'lord it over God's heritage'.

The Crown of Rejoicing

This is the soul-winners crown. It is for all believers who will set themselves to bring others to Christ. Paul looked upon the

Thessalonians who, through his gospel ministry, were brought to trust in Christ. He described them as his 'crown of rejoicing', 1 Thess. 2. 19-20.

The Crown of Righteousness

This is the crown for all who 'love his appearing', 2 Tim. 4. 8. The apostle Paul was looking back over his Christian life and service. After having run the race and fought a good fight, he could say, 'There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day'. The apostle goes on to say, 'And not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing' - those whose lives show they are eagerly looking forward to His coming again.

The Incorruptible Crown

This is the victor's crown and is for believers who have disciplined their body and have got the mastery over the 'old man'. To win the contest means the denying of ourselves. Athletes train hard and deny themselves even legitimate things to win gold at the Olympics, but we do it for a heavenly reward, 1 Cor. 9. 25-27.

We must not yield to fleshly lust, nor permit ourselves to be diverted from

the goal by worldly interests and pleasures. If we do not want to be ashamed at His coming let us see to it that we keep our body under and secure the incorruptible crown and hear, 'Well done, good and faithful servant'.

Paul, looking at the reward side of Christianity in association with the judgement seat of Christ, said it made him do three things:

- 1 It made him ambitious to please God wherever he was, saying, 'We are ambitious to be well-pleasing unto him. For we must all be made manifest before the judgment-seat of Christ', 2 Cor. 5. 9, 10 RV margin. It gave him a single eye towards the Lord Jesus.
- 2 It made him plead earnestly with people to turn to God and be saved. He said it is because of the solemn fear of the Lord, which is always present in our minds, that we work to win others. God knows our hearts whether we are pure in this matter, 2 Cor. 5. 11.
- 3 It prevented Paul from judging others. He said, 'Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock, or an occasion to fall in his brother's way', Rom. 14. 13.

This brings the judgement seat of Christ down to the everyday things of life. It made Paul very particular in his walk as a Christian - a consistent walk before God. The same grace is available to us, enabling us to have the testimony that we please Him with an honest heart. Let us also keep in mind that we shall share with Christ in His coming to earth. Let us live today that we might have an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, 2 Pet. 1. 11.

ERIC PARMENTER is in fellowship in the Ynysybwl assembly in South Wales and ministers God's word, both in the UK and abroad.





Angolan Literature Fund

UK Charity Registration No. 1077591

The Angolan Literature Fund was established in September 1998 with the aim of furthering the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, providing literature for the edifying of believers and making the scriptures available in Angola.

Over the years since the Fund has been established it has been able to equip and maintain two small printing works in Luanda, the capital, and in Saurimo, capital of the Lunda Sul province. These printing works, although small, have proved to be sufficient in maintaining and supporting the various aspects of the activities of the local assemblies and missionaries. Small Bible commentaries, Emmaus courses and gospel tracts are all printed on site and made available to the people at reduced prices. This has proved to be an invaluable addition to the work of the spread of the gospel.

In addition, the Fund has been able to finance the reprint of 20,000 Chokwe Bibles and recently 24,000 Portuguese Bibles have been purchased from Brazil and are now available in various locations within Angola. Much sound literature has been purchased and sent to Angola, giving many who wish to study the word of God the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the Lord and His word. 2000 copies of William MacDonald's *Believer's Bible Commentary* in Portuguese have been purchased and are proving to be a great blessing and help to many.

The current literature projects being undertaken by the Fund include the



reprinting of Umbundu Hymnbooks (30,000 copies), and the Chokwe Hymnbook (10,000 copies). The sourcing of a large number of Bible dictionaries and encyclopaedias in the Portuguese language is a priority in an endeavour to help meet the constant thirst for Bible study aids amongst the younger generation who have been educated in the Portuguese language. The Ritchie series 'Focus On' is currently being translated into Portuguese and Chokwe and when printed these will be a blessing to many who seek

simple explanations about baptism, the assurance of salvation and the Lord's Supper amongst other important truths.

The Trustees acknowledge the gracious provision of the Lord in enabling the Fund to contribute towards His great work in Angola in so many ways. The Trustees value the prayers of the Lord's people that the Fund may continue to be a blessing to many Angolans, and that the literature provided might be used for the building up of God's people and the salvation of many souls.

For more information, please feel free to contact any of the Trustees: A. Griffiths (Eastbourne); B. Howden (Helions Bumpstead); V. Michael (Maidenhead); R. Wood (Plymouth); M. Horlock (Cardiff).



REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES Compiled by SANDY JACK



ENGLAND

London

Jonathan and Joy Black, who have been commended by the Harryville assembly in Ballymena, Northern Ireland, to serve the Lord in London, have been involved in gospel meetings in **Clifton Hall, South Norwood**. Each night there were unsaved in under the sound of the gospel. When visiting this area door-to-door, they spoke with people from a range of cultural and religious backgrounds. Conversations at the doors offered a great opportunity to present a simple gospel message, even to those who will not come into the Hall.

Each Wednesday Jonathan and Joy have also been conducting open-air meetings and distributing gospel tracts in the centre of London. Over the summer they have focused on an area close to Victoria station and have been encouraged by those who have sat and listened, including those who work in the area, tourists and homeless. Following the preaching questions are often asked, even by those who claim to be atheists. Please pray for the contacts made through open-air work.

Yorkshire

The 16th residential Yorkshire Bible Study Week was held at Sneaton Castle Centre, Whitby, in October, with over eighty people from all parts of the U.K. in attendance. Phil Coulson led Bible Readings on Romans 12 and 13 and gave ministry on 'Aspects of Priesthood'. The excellent teaching and warm fellowship were much appreciated.

Nottinghamshire

The small assembly at **Kirkby-in-Ashfield**, Nottinghamshire, convened another 'Evangelism Day' on the 8th October. They were joined by eighteen young people from other assemblies for an intensive day of evangelism around the town.

Although the weather was poor, with rain throughout the day, 2500 tracts were distributed and a short meeting was held in the town centre shopping precinct. The enthusiasm of the young people was particularly appreciated as they braved the elements throughout the day.

The saints were encouraged by the contacts made, by conversations with various people, by an increase of seventy

hits to the assembly web site over two days, and by two men who came to the gospel meeting as a consequence of the tract work. Please pray for the seed sown.

It is hoped to repeat this effort in the new year, DV.

Cambridgeshire

At a recent series of meetings conducted by Peter Brandon at Roseford Chapel, **Cambridge**, the saints had the joy of seeing a man profess salvation. In addition, a leader of the local Brownie pack, who is supportive of the children's work, brought over 20 children from her pack to the gospel meeting, along with some of their parents. The gospel was clearly proclaimed and the outcome left with the Lord.

Wiltshire

Whilst many people visit the city of **Salisbury** to see its 123m cathedral spire, the small number of believers who meet at Barnard Street Gospel Hall, had the joy of sharing a greater treasure with a good number of the local children and adults. For two weeks, they opened the hall and invited the public to 'Discover the History of the World's Bestseller'. Around 160 children and 140 adults took up the invitation.

Hampshire

Another well-attended season of 'Friday Nights @ Winchester' have seen many young believers enjoy simple, challenging, and encouraging ministry from the word of God. This last series was entitled, 'Knowing Jesus Christ as . . . ' and covered, 'our Redeemer', 'our Bridegroom', 'our Great High Priest', 'our Advocate', and 'Head over all things'.

Liverpool

After a week of gospel meetings in Liverpool, Thomas and Dietburg Jennings had packed all their goods into their motor home, ready for the next leg of their journey of invitations in Scotland. Having locked and secured the vehicle, they returned to the hall to commit the saints to the Lord in prayer. They had said their goodbyes and on returning to the vehicle found that, even in that short space of time, it had been stolen!

They were totally reliant on the Lord as to what to do, as everything from computers, to credit cards, to clothes was gone and the Lord, in His matchless grace, immediately intervened and wonderfully supplied everything necessary for their safe return home to Northern Ireland. By Sunday, 2 October, Dietburg still maintained her belief that the Lord

would not allow His work to be thwarted . . . and, against all odds, on Monday, 3 October, they received a telephone call from the Merseyside Police Authority advising them that the motor home had been found. The van and the contents have now been recovered with minimal damage.

A primary school in Liverpool has opened the doors for a local brother to teach about scripture to four classes each week for the first six weeks of 2012. The school has also agreed to take the *Bromborough Bible Exhibition*.

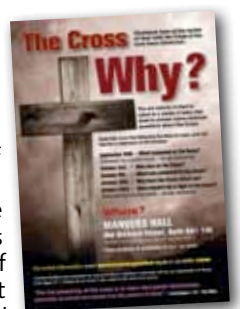
The assembly in **Huyton** have seen the contacts through their Parent & Toddler group grow. In December 2011 the parents were invited to one of the local saint's home for supper and a brief message about the real meaning of the birth of Christ. The saints were encouraged recently when a Botswanean lady visited the hall, and subsequently trusted the Lord for salvation. She asks challenging questions every time she meets the believers. Please pray for her preservation and progress.

Open Airs continue in Liverpool city centre with some younger brethren doing the bulk of the work. An additional worker has joined the group of workers recently. This brother is gifted in personal evangelism and each week is successful in engaging many individuals in conversation. He is also an excellent writer of tracts and has written some bespoke tracts for use in this work on the streets.

Somerset

The work at **Manvers Hall, Bath**, continues amongst the young and old. A recent special series of Family Services was held based on the theme of 'The Cross - Why?' A number of the believers brought along friends and family and the response was encouraging. The first and last of the series were followed by a meal, and this provided good opportunities for conversation with those who came along.

There was an exercise amongst the believers to commence an after-school work amongst primary school aged children. Almost thirty children have attended each Wednesday afternoon between 4.15-5.15 p.m., and a number of parents regularly stay. This has been a great encouragement and much enjoyed by the children attending. Particularly





Bibles for Children at Pensford Primary School in December

pleasing has been the number of friends of the believers' children who have attended.

A recent series of Friday night ministry sessions have also provided great help and encouragement to the believers. A good number have joined from other places for this series entitled 'Inspire!' The series challenges us to find our inspiration in the inspired word of God as we seek to continue our testimony. The current series focuses on 'continuing steadfastly . . .', and, so far, useful sessions have looked at doctrine, fellowship and preaching the gospel with boldness.

The assembly in **Pensford** has once again supported the Bibles for Children ministry and brother Philip Veater was able to distribute Children's Bibles to 22 new starts at Pensford Primary School in December (see picture above).

There was opportunity to speak to the children as a group, together with the rest of the school. Philip was surprised and encouraged by the answers to his questions about the Bible and the Lord Jesus as to who He was and what He had done. In this school 'religious education' has caught the interest of the children and is having results. It is the belief of the saints that the Bibles distributed over the years may have contributed to this.

In the run up to Christmas and the annual Carol Service the new Precious Seed Olympic-themed calendars were distributed to every home in the village and beyond. We trust many will hang this attractive calendar in their homes where the Word of God will be seen and read on a regular basis during the year.

The annual week of children's special meetings was held in early October at Coleford Gospel Hall, **Coleford, Nr Bath**, with David Tinkler. Good numbers of children came, and as well as learning a text each day, they took home scripture texts to colour, and keenly returned them the next day. The prize-giving family service was again well attended on the final Sunday. David managed to visit a

number of schools in the area taking assemblies and giving illustrated Bible stories. For the first time he was able to obtain permission to go along to the Coleford village junior school.

1,100 Precious Seed Gospel 2012 calendars have been distributed, together with invitations to the Christmas Family service at which Ben Beckett was responsible for communicating the gospel. This event is always well attended.

Gospel literature distribution has continued in the locality including many neighbouring villages around Coleford. One man contacted has come several times to the Breaking of Bread service. He shows a keen interest to learn more of our doctrine and practice, having been familiar with more formalised church services - he has expressed interest in having Bible study.

An 18-year-old lad has been saved, having come to the Sunday School for many years - he comes to most of the gatherings and is visibly growing in the Lord.

The fortnightly 'Friday Club' for teenagers continues to prosper and although sometimes it is disrupted by the few, there are those who listen carefully to the gospel messages. The ladies meeting also prospers with two older ladies recently added to the numbers - they have asked that Bibles be purchased for them and they also wish to have regular Bible Reading notes. One of these ladies said many years ago that she would never set foot in the Gospel Hall!

The Mums and Toddlers continues to be an encouragement with twenty or so mums coming along each week - some of the toddlers have come to the Sunday School as a result of contacts made as a result of this work.

Staffordshire

Graeme Paterson conducted children's meetings for one week in November at **Winshill**. Between twenty to thirty

children came along each evening and a couple of parents also came in. Graeme also went into local schools to take assemblies and spoke to just under 1000 children, each receiving a gospel calendar.

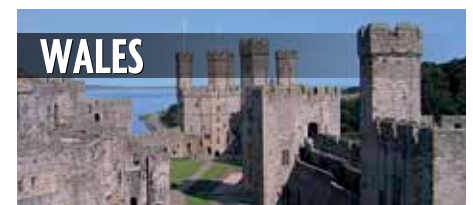


Aberdeenshire

At Holburn Gospel Hall, **Aberdeen**, the assembly again ran a Bible exhibition in early September and saw close on 300 children from local Primary 6 and 7 classes come along. Each pupil completed a work sheet and prizes were awarded for the best; copies of the Precious Seed daily reading book, *Stepping Stones*, were issued as prizes.

As a follow-up to the exhibition, Gordon McCracken also visited for two separate weeks in October and November. Gordon had a week's children's meetings in two school locations in the city with regular attendances of twenty to twenty-five children each evening. Prize-givings were held at the end of each week with a good number of parents attending.

In addition, access was given to around fifteen schools for school assemblies. These visits were well received, as they have been over the past few years. Prayer would be valued that the word sown in so many young hearts will yet bring forth fruit.



The saints in the assembly at **Tredegar** held a Bible Exhibition for two weeks in September and were greatly encouraged to see about 500 children and adults attend.

The assembly in **Port Talbot** have put *Seedsowers* into 2,000 homes along with details of their Carol Service. It was also good to have the help of a group of young believers to distribute 700 calendars to local homes.



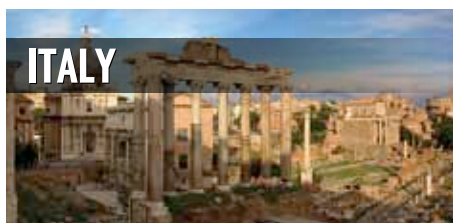
Limerick

The believers in **Newcastle West** would value prayer for a man called Mike, who is in his late 30's. Mike and his wife were neighbours of Andrew and Gillian Shanks, five years ago.



Contact with him was lost after they moved to Newcastle West. However, last year, on the 23rd December, Andrew met Mike in the town. Mike explained that his marriage had broken down, that he had lost his job, and was now living with his mother in Newcastle West. After a good chat and an invitation to the meeting was given there was no other contact until one Sunday in March Mike turned up at the Gospel meeting. Mike now comes to most of the meetings, and, in November, he expressed to Andrew his desire to be saved. Please pray for this man. He was raised a Roman Catholic but now reads his Bible every day, and comes to meetings. How good it would be to see him truly saved and have the assurance of being so.

The Lord once again made it possible for a scripture text to be put up on a billboard sign at the main roadside through Newcastle West for two weeks in December. Please pray that God will move people's hearts in response to this.



The believers in **Pozzuoli** have had the joy of seeing some more people baptized. Due to lots of problems with the people who live around the hall, (during the baptisms earlier in the year, they called the police to try stop the meeting) they decided to have the baptisms in Alec and Patrizia's garden and use the children's swimming pool! There were quite a number of non-Christians present, and the Lord really blessed the word preached. How good to be able to

give thanks for His grace and power! The Sunday evening open-air meetings on the sea-front have seen crowds of adults as well as children stop, most of them staying to listen to the whole message.

The believer's have been offered the use of a hall which is twice the size of the current one. However, it is in another part of Pozzuoli; out of the city centre where they have been since the commencement of the assembly, fourteen years ago. This would be a big change for them, and they are before the Lord for His guidance. They would appreciate prayer that the Lord would make it very clear as to His will.



September 16th 2011 was an auspicious day for the saints meeting at the **Klang** Gospel Hall. It was the first national holiday commemorating the formation of Malaysia – an amalgamation of the peninsular with two other former British colonies of Sabah and Sarawak in 1963.

Even more significant to the Lord's people was that they celebrated 100 years of God's faithfulness and leading in the assembly, with more than 350 believers, including those from outstation assemblies, who had attended the Thanksgiving Service.

The witness in Klang began in 1911 through the effort of Mr. Chew Boon Hean, a convicted opium addict who was saved in the prison, and upon his release, he constructed a wooden Hall for meetings.

Local Christians worked alongside missionaries from Britain, Australia and New Zealand to build the assembly into what it is today. Mr. Ng Eng Yen, with his son Mr. David Ng Kong Lam, Mr. Chellappah Abishegam, Dr. G.D. James, and Mr. Lim Chin Kheng were among the early brethren who toiled for the Lord in the Klang assembly. Mr. E. V. Brewerton, Mr. T. R. Angus with his son Mr. David Angus, Mr. S. S. Adams, Mr. Bill Wilson, Mr. A. E. Phillips, Mr. William Stott and a host of other missionaries ministered God's word to the saints in Klang. Mr. and Mrs. Tom Watt from Scotland were also stationed in Klang, where he was one of the elders. From one assembly there are now five other centres housing six English, Chinese and Tamil speaking assemblies. Surely the Lord has been good!

e-Magazine for March 2012

Don't forget that from 1st March you can access the PSI e-Magazine through the website www.preciousseed.org

Have a look at it and let us know what you think. www.preciousseed.org

Precious Seed aids for evangelism

Precious Seed Publications has for the first time printed gospel calendars for distribution door to door. The calendars for 2012 had an Olympic theme and over 40,000 were produced for assemblies in UK and overseas. Each calendar is overprinted with details of the distributing assembly and purchasers are able to choose the Bible version they wish to use for the texts. Many have written in to say they were delighted with the quality and with the polybag envelope which not only protects the calendar but makes it easy to slide into letterboxes and under doors. Let us pray that the calendars will be displayed in many homes and that the texts will have effect in many hearts.



The first issue of the gospel pamphlet *Faith Matters* is now available to assemblies and individuals. It is 12 pages in size B6, and in full colour. The articles are written by evangelists Ian Rees, Blair Martin, Stephen Baker and Paul McCauley.

There is a testimony by Alec Catchpole and an introduction by Johnny Black. If you would like copies these can be ordered on the Precious Seed website or by post. The pamphlet will be published twice per year and is backed up by its own website www.faithmatters.org.uk



Please pray with us that this initiative will be blessed of the Lord.

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The pricing for these books is in Euros and on the price list within the back cover of this magazine where a price is shown in GB£ that is the same price in Euros, for example the title Day by Day Living in the promised Land costs GB£8.95 and the Euro price is Euros 8.95. Postage is added at cost.

For direct sales at assembly meetings the same pricing applies.

A WORD FOR TODAY

bikkûrîm (early harvest or firstfruits)

bikkûr (firstfruits, first ripe)

blg (be cheerful, be happy)

Unsurprisingly, with an agrarian economy that formed the major part of Israel's day to day existence in the Promised Land, the term 'firstfruits' was employed by God as a motif to underline the various harvests that belonged to Him.

The main Hebrew terms used in the Old Testament for 'firstfruits' are **re'shit** and its synonym **bikkûr**. The former term occurs more frequently, because it embraces both the literal and metaphorical senses of 'firstfruits' whereas the latter term is applied only literally. The meaning of 'firstfruits' is initially developed by God in association with the various harvests that Israel reaped from the land, see, for example, Exodus chapter 23 verses 16 and 19, where the term is related to the three most important Jewish festivals, Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The 'firstfruits' or 'earliest fruits', Neh. 10. 35; Ezek. 44. 30, were dedicated to God as an offering to signify that the entire harvest belonged to Him since He owned the land, Lev. 25. 23, and was also responsible for ensuring that it produced fruit in due season, Deut. 8. 10-18. The historical and theological reasons for this principle of dedicating the 'firstfruits' to God are explained in Deuteronomy chapter 26 verses 1-11. The actual ceremony of offering the 'firstfruits' was, however, contingent upon Israel entering, and conquering the Promised Land, and, more to the point, living in the land and reaping successive harvests. PETER CRAIGIE points out that, 'Unlike Passover and the covenant ceremony, the offering of firstfruits would be a new religious institution in Israel; before taking possession of the land, they were not an agricultural people and therefore had no harvest festival'.¹

It was not just the 'firstfruits' that were to be given to God, but also first-born animals, and, importantly, first-born children, Exod. 13. 2; 22. 28-29, unless they were redeemed. Rabbinical scholars believe that the practice of dedicating animals to God can be traced back to Abel when he brought the 'choicest of the firstlings of his flock' (Tanakh), as a gift to the Lord, Gen. 4. 4. What is therefore being emphasized in all these practices is that irrespective of status, everyone in Israel was obliged to give God the first and the best of everything that they owned or possessed. In doing so, there would be great reward for obedience to God's word, Prov. 3.9. But even when Israel was between harvests, they were not to appear before God empty, Exod. 23. 15, which would be far more of a challenge to them than in the seasons of plenty, Deut. 16. 16-17. Specifically, they were to appear before God with their own gift according to the measure of the blessing that God had bestowed upon them, Deut. 16. 17. Sadly, Israel soon forgot the blessings that had accrued to them and it needed men like Nehemiah, Neh. 10. 35-37; 12. 44, to revive and restore the practice of bringing 'firstfruits' to God. We could pause here and ask ourselves the question whether our giving to God truly reflects all that He has blessed us with? Is our gratitude limited to our economic circumstances or are we prepared to give liberally to God and others, even out of penury, Luke 21. 4; 2 Cor. 8. 2; 9. 6-7?

So far we have seen how the term for 'firstfruits' has been used literally, but there are a number of important texts in the Old Testament where the term is used by way of metaphor. In Jeremiah chapter 2 verse 3, the nation of Israel is described as being 'holy to the Lord', cp. Deut. 7. 6, and the firstfruits of His harvest. In the preceding verse, there

is the suggestion that because Israel was faithful to God in an unsown land, then it has become consecrated to God as 'firstfruits' in a cultivated land. In other words, as MICHAEL FISHBANE states, 'Israel *is* the very fruitful produce of the land. And since in another oracle Jeremiah also refers to the people of Israel as the "land-inheritance" of YHWH (10. 16; 51. 19), there is no reason to be surprised that also in 2. 3 Israel is described as the possession of the Lord'.² Similarly, in Ezekiel chapter 48 verse 14, the tribal portions of the land in the temple vision of Ezekiel are identified as a special portion or 'firstfruits' – the Septuagint translates this verse as, 'And the firstfruits shall be given to them out of the firstfruits of the land, even a most holy portion'.

By

**BRIAN
CLATWORTHY**

Newton Abbot,
England

When we turn to the New Testament we find that the dynamic Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term **re'shit** (**aparchê**) is used mainly by Paul as a metaphor for various aspects of Christian doctrine.

These can be grouped as follows:

Text	Subject	Explanation
Romans chapter 8 verse 23	The Holy Spirit	The term 'firstfruits' is used here to emphasize that the Holy Spirit is the guarantee (or down payment) of the age to come, cp. 2 Cor. 1. 22; 5. 5; Eph. 1. 14
Romans chapter 16 verse 5 and 1 Corinthians chapter 16 verse 15	Believers in a particular location	The term 'firstfruits' is used here to emphasize that these first groups of believers are symbolic of a greater harvest of believers to come, cp. Jas. 1. 18
1 Corinthians chapter 15 verses 20 and 23	The Resurrection of Christ	The term 'firstfruits' is used here to emphasize that Christ's bodily resurrection is the guarantee that others will be resurrected in the future.

Paul makes one literal reference to 'firstfruits' in Romans chapter 11 verse 16 where he is probably alluding to the offering of the first yield of the dough, as in Numbers chapter 15 verses 17 to 21. The dough was given to the priests, as well as all the choice 'firstfruits' and this subsequently brought blessing to the householder, Ezek. 44. 30; cp. 2 Cor. 9. 8-11. The dough offering is therefore viewed as analogous to the offering of 'firstfruits'. There are two other references to 'firstfruits' in the New Testament, James chapter 1 verse 18 and Revelation chapter 14 verse 4. In both these instances, the word is used as a metaphor for future harvests.

The term 'firstfruits', therefore, not only signifies the things that should be dedicated to God, but ultimately reminds us of those things that belong to Him. Even more amazing is that God condescends, in His grace, to share these things with us. May we respond to Him by dedicating our lives and everything that we possess in His service, Rom. 12. 1-3. Furthermore, let us remember that He is Lord of the harvest, and continue to pray that He will send out labourers into His harvest field, Matt. 9. 38.

For further reading/study

Introductory

The Feast of Firstfruits (pp. 54-65) in *Seven Old Testament Feasts* by A. McDONALD REDWOOD.

Advanced

T. DESMOND ALEXANDER AND DAVID W. BAKER (ED) *Dictionary of the Old Testament – Pentateuch*.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Deuteronomy* (TNICOT) pg. 320 – Note also in this context the comments that Joseph would relay to Pharaoh about his family, 'And the men are shepherds for their trade hath been to feed cattle', Gen. 46. 32a (KJV).
- ² *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, pg. 301.

Christian Biographies on the Web

I always enjoy reading Christian biographies, especially when an author gives a personal account of his or her conversion. Of course, we know this is sound biblical practice: Paul's Damascus Road experience features three times in the Acts, twice narrated by the apostle himself. Such committed Christians provide us with good examples - 'whose faith follow', Heb. 13. 7.

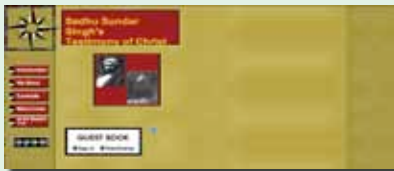
The *Assembly Testimony* magazine used to have a regular 'Conversion and Call' column on its inside back cover. These articles are all archived in a searchable web database at <http://www.assemblytestimony.org>. A particular favourite of mine is **John Heading**, a well-known university lecturer and Bible student. He gives a frank account of his salvation and subsequent service at <http://www.assemblytestimony.org/?q=node/53#08>



A number of 'Chief men among the brethren' appear in Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia. Examples include **F. F. Bruce** (UK Bible scholar) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FF_Bruce and **Jim Elliot** (US missionary to Ecuador) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jim_Elliot. Of course, one should always bear in mind that Wikipedia is not necessarily edited by Christians, and may be unreliable in places.



Casting the net wider, I often find encouragement and challenge from reading testimonies of Christians with various other doctrinal and denominational backgrounds. Whilst I would not concur with all their ministry, their life stories are heart-warming. For instance, consider **Sadhu Sundar Singh**, the Indian itinerant teacher brought up as a Sikh, who found Christ in dramatic circumstances as he was about to commit suicide. An account of his conversion is available at <http://sadhusundarsingh.homestead.com>.



Henry Martyn was a talented Cambridge mathematician in the early 1800s. However, he turned his back on a promising academic career in order to take the gospel message to India and, later, Persia. He translated the Bible into several languages, and crossed continents to preach in the 'regions beyond', 2 Cor. 10. 16. His inspirational life story is recorded at <http://www.gfamissions.org/missionary-biographies/martyn-henry-1781-1812.html>. Martyn's key quotation was that he wanted to 'burn out for God,' which he did literally, since the Lord called him home at the age of 31.



Another missionary who provided some memorable quotations is **Hudson Taylor**. For instance, he said that, 'Christ is either Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all'. Taylor also suffered terrible hardship to bring the gospel to fresh territory, in his case imperial China. A selection of useful biographical material is available at <http://www.wholesomewords.org/biography/biorptaylor.html>.



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Views from the News

COMPILED BY SANDY JACK

Cameron's Big Society needs Christian values behind it

David Cameron's "Big Society" dream will fail unless the country rediscovers traditionally Christian values, according to the academic credited with helping develop the concept.

Phillip Blond, a think-tank director known as the Prime Minister's philosopher-king, will say in a speech today that the individualism fostered by the state and markets in recent decades has damaged society. He claims that this decline in "social capital" and the "disintegration" of relationships has reduced support for the country's most vulnerable people. In order for Mr. Cameron's idea of a "Big Society" to succeed, with citizens taking back power from the state to volunteer or run co-operative organisations, Mr. Blond believes that people will need to become less selfish. 'Moral markets, and a return to civic association, require Christian values: mutuality, subsidiarity, reciprocity, solidarity, mediation - both in the theological and institutional sense', he says. He called for the introduction of specific policies to support traditional families and old-fashioned local companies. These include a married couples' tax allowance, at first for those with children under two years old, and additional support for family-run firms.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/david-cameron/8912860/Camerons-Big-Society-needs-Christian-values-behind-it-says-Blond.html>

Church of England pours cold water on hopes for civil partnership ceremonies

The Church of England has announced that it will not allow civil partnership ceremonies to take place in its churches unless the full General Synod gives its consent. A law enabling same-sex couples to register their partnerships in places of worship, removing a key legal distinction between the ceremony and marriage, came into force on Monday 5th December, 2011. But in a letter to the synod, secretary general William Fittall said no Church of England religious premises could host the registration of partnerships without written permission from the national assembly.

Peter Tatchell, the gay rights campaigner, called the move an 'infringement of religious freedom' and criticised the government for failing to force religious groups to host the ceremonies.

But the church's legal office said its regulations do not constitute unlawful discrimination under the Equality Act as marriage and civil partnerships are different services and legally distinct concepts. It said in a statement, 'A gentlemen's outfitter is not required to supply women's clothes. A children's bookshop is not required to stock books that are intended for adults'. 'And a church that provides a facility to marry is not required to provide a facility to same-sex couples for registering civil partnerships'.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/dec/03/church-of-england-no-civil-partnerships>

Speaker squanders taxpayer money on 'equality' crest

The Speaker of the House of Commons has been criticised for squandering over £20,000 of taxpayers' money on his new coat of arms, which features a prominent 'equality' rainbow.

John Bercow, who was named Politician of the Year 2010 by a homosexual campaign group, has become well known for championing 'homosexual rights'. His coat of arms, designed by him with the help of the College of Arms, shows rainbow colours on a scroll and the motto "All Are Equal", to signify the Speaker's support for the 'gay rights' agenda. The new crest also includes pink triangles which are used as a symbol of the homosexual lobby. Mr Bercow also had a special painting of himself commissioned at a further cost of £22,000 to the taxpayer. Tory MP Rob Wilson said, 'I am surprised that the Speaker feels it is a good use of public money in such challenging economic times'.

Mathew Sinclair, director of the TaxPayers' Alliance, said, 'It's very excessive at this time of public sector austerity for the Speaker to spend tens of thousands of pounds on a vanity portrait of himself.'

<http://www.christian.org.uk/news/speaker-squanders-taxpayer-money-on-equality-crest/>



Bits & Bobs

Why Don't Animals Need a Barber?

While many of us make periodic trips to the barber, most nonhuman mammals always appear in perfect trim without a barber. The reason for this is that hair grows in a cyclic manner. A relatively long period of growth (that varies with the type and location of the hair) is followed by a short period of rest after which the hair is released from the follicle, and a new growth cycle begins forming a new hair. Thus the length of the growth cycle determines the length of the hair. If hair grew longer and longer without being released from the follicle, it would be disastrous for the mammals that don't visit a barber. Can you imagine, for example, a squirrel dashing through the branches, dragging a couple feet of hair? The Lord thinks of everything!



Hair grows about 0.3 mm per day. Within a year, our scalp and beard can produce nearly five inches (13 cm). By comparison, the longest hairs on our arm have a growth cycle of less than two months. The growth cycle of scalp and beard hairs varies from individual to individual but can be several years. A Vietnamese man was reported to have the longest scalp hair, which measured over 20 ft. (6 m) long. According to a BBC News report in June 2004, he claimed not to have cut his hair in more than 30 years.



We stand in awe of Christ our Creator, who has lavished such exquisite design and complexity on even the hairs of our body. We are greatly comforted by Christ our Protector, who has numbered the very hairs of our head and will not permit one hair to be harmed if it is not His will. And finally, we are eternally grateful for the amazing grace of Christ our Saviour who allowed His own hairs to be plucked from His cheeks as He endured taunting, torment, and death for our sins.

"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (Isaiah 50:6, KJV).

You can read the full article at: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v2/n3/amazing-human-hair>

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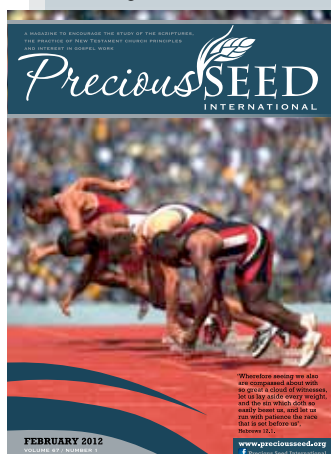
Front Cover illustration:

The 2012 London Olympics will soon be upon us! One of the highlights of the Olympics is scheduled to take place on the 5th of August, the men's 100m sprint final! Eight men competing to be the fastest man in the world! It lasts only for 10 seconds or 9.58 seconds for a certain Jamaican, but it is a thrilling spectacle nevertheless! However, in spite of the very impressive and dramatic nature of the 100m, the word of God in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1 tells us that life is not like a sprint. It is more like a marathon. It needs to be paced and run patiently. 'Let us run with patience the race' is the challenge that we all face.

There are certain criteria that characterize the successful runner. Firstly with discipline we need to put off things that will affect our performance, things that will weigh us down and hinder us in life, 'let us lay aside every weight'. Secondly we need to put off sin that will trip us up 'and the sin which doth so easily beset us'. Thirdly we need to run 'with patience'. The thought is joyful endurance.

The Olympic runner is looking forward to the finishing line. We as Christians are looking forward

to meeting the Lord Jesus Christ. There are great examples of those who joyfully endured in chapter 11, but none like our blessed Saviour. Hebrews chapter 2 verse 2 continues with this thought, 'Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.'



Question Time

Conducted by

RICHARD COLLINGS

Unless otherwise stated all
scripture quotations are
from the New King
James Version

QUESTION

**Should there be a minimum age
set for those requesting baptism?**

ANSWER

The only guide we have to assist us in responding to questions relating to spiritual things is the word of God. Such a statement may appear to be a very obvious thing to say, yet in practice there are times when we add to the scriptures regulations of our own making. The reasons for these additions may be laudable, and sometimes necessary, but we must ensure that they do not take precedence over the Bible; neither should we expect them to be binding on all believers.

One issue where we have to exercise care relative to these matters relates to the above question. Some may believe that it is not suitable for children to be baptized until they have reached a certain age. Others may feel it is more appropriate for them to wait until they have completed secondary school education, by which time they will have acquired some experiential awareness of the pressures of teenage life.

What a thrill it is to see young believers developing, irrespective of their age, and it must not be expected that these 'novices' will know as much about the implications of baptism as those who have been saved for many years. I doubt whether the eunuch who Phillip met in the desert had a full understanding of the doctrine relative to baptism, yet he knew enough about it to realize that it was a commitment expected of all who believe. The same principle is true concerning salvation and assembly fellowship. Few, if any, of us had a full grasp of the doctrine of salvation at the moment we were converted, but we knew enough to realize that as guilty sinners we stood in desperate need of God's undeserved forgiveness. When we were received into fellowship there was probably a considerable amount of 'church truth' we did not know but we had sufficient understanding to accept that there were privileges and responsibilities associated with our decision. Just as we had to increase in our understanding about salvation and fellowship after both had been experienced so it will be concerning baptism.

To the best of my knowledge we have no specific instances in the New Testament of the conversion of children, although we are aware that Timothy had been taught the scriptures from his infancy. However, this does not mean that children were not saved in the 1st century, and I am also sure that many readers of this response will have been saved very early in life. That being so, what should we do when someone very young asks if they can be baptized?

The primary requisite is to be as certain as we can that the child is a believer. Philip's answer to the question 'What hinders me from being baptized' was direct: 'If you believe with all your heart, you may', Acts 8. 37. Having established the genuineness of the profession of salvation the next priority would be to determine their motive for wanting to be baptized. Parental or peer pressure are insufficient reasons to proceed; the young person must have some measure of understanding that the scriptures clearly teach that all who are saved should be baptized.

Whoever speaks to them about their desire to be baptized would also want to set out some of the basic implications pertaining to baptism as presented in the epistles. Whilst the act of being baptized happens once only, it is meant to regulate our conduct throughout the remainder of life. Peter describes it as 'the answer of a good conscience toward God', 1 Pet. 3. 21.

Although the New Testament indicates that all who are in assembly fellowship must be baptized, it must not be expected that every applicant for baptism will want to join a local church immediately. This will be true in many instances but particularly so in the case of a very young person. However, we must not think that a lack of suitability for fellowship precludes them from complying with the Lord's instructions to the disciples, 'Go . . . and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit', Matt. 28. 19.

Rather than implementing a specific policy governing the point at which someone can be baptized, the wiser course of action would be to examine each case individually and to respond to it in light of the New Testament teaching.