

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

Precious SEED

INTERNATIONAL



'And if a man also strive
for masteries, yet is he
not crowned, except he
strive lawfully',
2 Tim. 2. 5.

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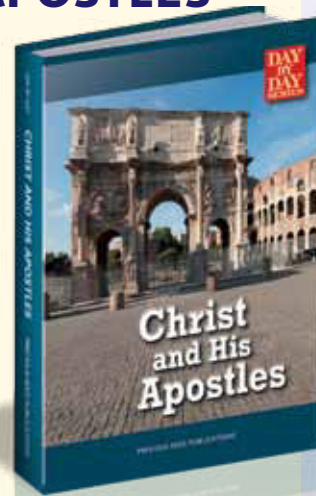
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PRECIOUS SEED INTERNATIONAL FACTS AND FIGURES

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Book Reviews

By JOHN BENNETT and JOHN SCARBROOK

Books are available from the publishers shown (or from John Ritchie in the UK or Gospel Folio Press in Canada), and **NOT** from Precious Seed Publications



"Thank You, King James" – the tough life of Robert Hicks James Hastings

Paperback, 160pp. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster. HR6 8NZ. Price: £6.00. ISBN 978-1-846252-32-7.

It was the psalmist who wrote, 'He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings', Ps. 40. 2. Reading this traumatic and troubling story, it would seem a most apt text to write over the life described.

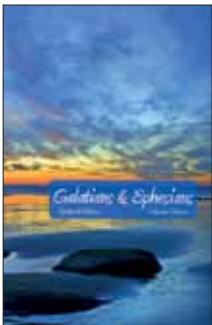
Robert Hicks was born in Birmingham, spending much of his early life in 'different overcrowded houses and lengthy stays in care homes'. He grew up without memory of his mother 'ever hugging or kissing me unless it was to impress visiting social workers. Birthdays and Christmas went unmarked . . . there was just silence born out of sheer disinterest'. His memories of his father, who

returned from military service in the Second World War in 1947, were worse, describing him as violent and pitiless, one who 'took a perverse pleasure in beating, ridiculing and ignoring' his children.

For a boy tongue-tied, dyslexic, rejected by his parents and poorly educated the future looked grim until Robert discovered a book unknown to him called the Holy Bible. The advice of the surgeon who had performed the simple operation to cut the membrane holding Robert's tongue was 'read a book out loud while writing the words'. The only book that Robert could find in his house was the Bible that had been pushed behind the gas meter. Starting at Genesis chapter 1 he began the task that was to transform his life.

From such seemingly hopeless conditions Robert Hicks was saved, baptized and received into the fellowship of Christians meeting in the Gospel Hall, Jiggins Lane, Birmingham. As well as growing physically and spiritually, Robert also developed a talent in retailing, rising quickly from grocer's boy to relief provisions manager before becoming the manager of his own shop as part of the Mason group.

It is remarkable that out of a home characterized by moral depravity and child abuse there should grow a man who has contributed so much to the work of the Lord in a variety of ways. It is a testimony to the grace and sustaining power of God that saved and has kept Robert Hicks. This is an honest, if initially harrowing, account of how God can, and does, change lives!



Galatians & Ephesians L. Strauss

Paperback, 250 pp. Published by Gospel Folio Press, 304 Killaly St. West, Port Colborne, ON, L3K 6A6, Canada. ISBN 978-1-926765-17-4.

This is a helpful commentary which provides the reader with a good grasp of two of Paul's Epistles. The author is concerned primarily to give the meaning of the text, but he writes warmly; he is clearly engaged with his material. He goes through the Epistles systematically. There are: succinct introductions to each Epistle; headings used as the author works through each section; the text of almost all the verses with a commentary. There are particularly useful discussions of: the incident recorded in Acts chapter 19 concerning the disciples whom Paul found at Ephesus; the responsibilities of parents and children, based on Ephesians chapter 6 verses 1-4; the contrast between the Mosaic law and the promises to Abraham, and the purpose of the law, based on Galatians chapter 3.

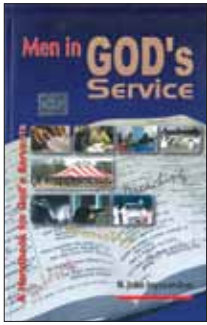
Other good features include: an occasional, but judicious, use of Greek, examples of which are found in the discussion of the term 'sent forth', Gal. 4. 4, and the word 'another', 1. 6-7. Comments from respected commentators, such as Ironside, Hogg and Vine, Murray, Wuest, and Moule, are helpfully incorporated into the text, again occasionally. The commentary is based on the KJV, but other versions are quoted, especially the American Standard Version.

This is a modest-sized book so not every aspect can be addressed; nevertheless, there are occasions when readers may feel more is needed. Some interpretations are presented without support, or with little or no explanation. For example, we are told not to 'judge' in the comments on Galatians chapter 6 verse 1; the term 'Israel of God' in Galatians chapter 6 is not dealt with; the 'flesh' is defined as the old nature; the verbs 'put off' and 'put on', Eph. 4. 22-24, are expounded as present obligations with no mention being made of their being interpreted as transactions in the past (as JND translates them, for example); Romans chapter 7 verses 7-25 is referred to as a 'struggle between the flesh and the Spirit', but the Holy Spirit is totally and significantly omitted in that section.

Like many writers, the author writes of the position of a pastor or minister of a church, but such intrudes but slightly into the commentary.

The author writes fluently, and the layout of the book is good; all verses quoted are helpfully italicized and there is effective use of occasional bold type.

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



Men in God's Service N. John Jeyanandam

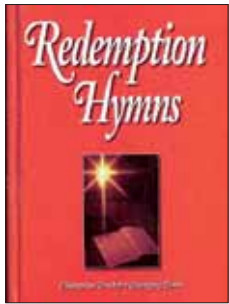
Paperback, 288pp. Published by Moriah Ministries, Post Box No. 2540, 51-57, East Park Road, Shenoy Nagar, Chennai, India 6000 030. Available in UK from John Ritchie Ltd. Price £10.00, ISBN 978-81-907600-7-2.

In the preface the author indicates that this book is the product of a personal exercise concerning the character and conduct that the Lord 'desires and expects' from His servants, as revealed in the scriptures. Five major themes are considered, embracing 'The Profile, Preparation and Performance of a servant of God'; 'Persevering as a servant of God'; and 'Precautions for a servant of God'. Each theme is then subdivided under associated headings. For example, under 'Persevering as a Servant of God' consideration is given to open-air work, personal work, visitation work, literature distribution and women's ministry.

It is rare to find in one volume such a wide variety of material. Brother Jeyanandam demonstrates the importance of every servant having firm convictions regarding the divine inspiration of God's word, that all preaching should be scriptural and Christ-centred, and, in the presentation of the gospel, the servant must give attention not just to the content of the message but also to the manner in which it is delivered, as well as the specific audience being addressed. Attention is also given to the personal, family, church, and prayer life of all who engage in God's work. In addition, this book contains much practical and helpful advice on such matters as how to study the Bible, how to respond when facing opposition, and how to answer questions and objections. The writer supports the teaching of the book by liberal reference to the scriptures and is not afraid to draw relevant, memorable, quotations from other servants of God. The appendix includes a list of helpful websites.

Some of the material is perhaps more suited to readers in the Indian subcontinent than Western readers, but these passages are minimal and do not detract from the value of this book. The author's treatment of his subject is most comprehensive and every thoughtful reader of this book will be helped and challenged. Many believers are more than aware of their own weaknesses and shortcomings and the author is to be commended for his desire to encourage and equip the reader to engage in acceptable and fruitful service for the Lord.

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



Redemption Hymns

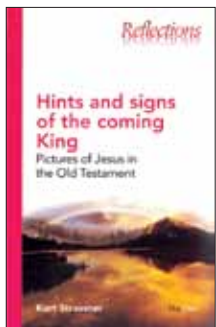
Published by the Emmaus Correspondence School, Wellington New Zealand; www.redhymns.com. ISBN Words: 987-0-473-15052-5 Music; 978-0-473-15053-2.

The decision to change a hymnbook is often a controversial one with competing desires to embrace good modern hymn-writing and maintain the timeless hymns which have been loved and sung for generations. With many congregations now using projected words at some or all gatherings, it is with interest that this hymnbook has come for review – does it have a place and can it meet both of the competing interests?

The answer to each is 'Yes', and 'No'. Comprising a little over 700 hymns, this collection covers a wide range of well-loved hymns, many favourites and quite a few which are not so familiar (at least to a UK

writer). The hymnbook is arranged alphabetically, which will suit some, but, at times, a thematic layout makes more sense (there is a thematic index at the back). It does, however, suffer from the desire to cover all eventualities, with a large section devoted to the Breaking of Bread, as well as most other gatherings, thus demonstrating a bit of a crisis of identity. Another disappointment is the relative lack of modern hymn writing, as is the tendency to change the words, with the older thee/ty replaced with you/your, which is quite jarring in many classic hymns. The music edition is clear with a good selection of tunes, including some not present in other widely-used hymnbooks. It also appears to be well bound, a real advantage given the usage these books often sustain. Is it good enough to consider replacing existing hymn books? Each congregation would have to make that judgement, but for me, the scarcity of modern hymn writing makes it less appealing, albeit it is a comprehensive collection of hymns.

[Our thanks to Keith Hunter, Killamarsh, England, for this review]



Hints and signs of the coming King Kurt Strassner

Paperback, 110pp. Published by Day One Publications, Ryelands Road, Leominster, HR6 8NZ. Price £5.00 ISBN 978-1-84625-208-2.

This book is sub-titled '*Pictures of Jesus in the Old Testament*'. It comprises the substance of a series of sermons preached by the author. The Lord Jesus said, 'Search the scriptures . . . they are they which testify of me', John 5. 39, and in the introduction to this book the author suggests that while faith comes by hearing, God has nevertheless given to us in the Bible many 'word pictures' to illustrate and to help us understand 'spiritual concepts'. These pictures are sometimes given using metaphorical language, such as 'all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass', 1 Pet. 1. 24, but equally they can be found in historical events.

In this book the writer develops eight 'pictures' God has given in the Old Testament of the work of the Lord Jesus on our behalf. Beginning with Noah's ark, attention is then given to: the offering up of Isaac; the Passover lamb; the manna from heaven; the tabernacle; the serpent lifted up; the king in the Song of Solomon; and the prophet Jonah. Each chapter concludes with three practical points to reflect upon. As an example of the author's style the 'manna from heaven' is expounded under four headings: necessary bread; undeserved bread; enough bread; and sweet bread. This book is primarily an evangelistic tool, each chapter focusing upon the need to be saved. Gospel preachers might find some of the outlines helpful, and younger believers might be helped to appreciate how the Old Testament scriptures testify of Christ.

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

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Editorial

‘Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you’, Matt. 28. 20.

In the Lord’s commission to His disciples there was the command to ‘Go . . . into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature’, Mark 16. 15. Therefore, it is appropriate that from every assembly there should be a gospel witness. What form that takes depends upon a multitude of factors. For some, tract distribution, open-air witness, regular gospel meetings, visitation, Sunday School, weekly children’s work, and a plethora of other activities might all feature in their busy schedule. Others may be somewhat more restricted in what they can do because of the size of the company. However, all should have an exercise in relation to reaching the lost.

But there is one thing that has been a distinctive feature of assembly life over the centuries and that is Bible teaching. Older saints will remember Bible Readings, and ministry meetings every week, and, for some, weeks of consecutive teaching with visiting speakers, when the scriptures were studied and taught. We might also recall sitting in meetings when we felt that the subject and the depth of study was beyond us, but, over the years, that teaching has begun to fit into place as our knowledge of the word of God has increased.

Sadly, it has become noticeable that one of the first meetings to disappear from the weekly schedule of a local church is the Bible teaching meeting. While this means that many saints have little or no spiritual fellowship from weekend to weekend, it also means that the consecutive Bible teaching upon which New Testament churches are based is disappearing. A cursory reading of the Acts of the Apostles would show the importance that the apostles attached to teaching. Barnabus brought Paul to Antioch, and we are told that they ‘taught much people’, Acts 11. 26. The importance of that activity can be seen two chapters later when it is said of the same church, that there were ‘certain prophets and teachers’, 13. 1, amongst them. Similarly, in Paul’s work at Corinth, ‘he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them’, 18. 11. How important, then, that the saints should be fed from the scriptures! How important that Bible teaching should feature in the life of every Christian church!

One of the original aims of this magazine was to ‘encourage the study of the scriptures’. It may be that as you read this editorial you can think of some believers locally, or further afield, who do not have the benefit of a weekly Bible teaching meeting. Do they receive a copy of this magazine? What would be really good to know is that, as a consequence, you might have a desire to provide them with something written, if they are no longer able to access what is taught orally. May the Lord be pleased to use this and similar magazines to the furtherance of His work in the building up and encouragement of His people!

Bible prophecy makes clear that there is going to be a unique and unparalleled period in the world's history. It will be the world's worst forty-two months. This period is known as the Great Tribulation which will take place in the second half of Daniel's seventieth week. It is variously described in scripture as 'the coming wrath', 'the day of the Lord', 'the time of Jacob's trouble', 'the trial which will come upon the earth', and 'the day of vengeance'. The whole of the tribulation will cover a seven year period following sometime after the rapture of the church. Joel chapter 2 verse 2 and Matthew chapter 24 verse 21 are two passages that make mention of an unequalled and unrepeatable time of trouble. It is not possible to have two such periods which can be unique and unparalleled. Both of the writers cited refer to disturbances in the heavenly bodies, such as the darkening of the moon just before the Lord comes to the earth.

The Lord, in Matthew chapter 24, predicts what will happen at the beginning of the tribulation, vv. 4-8, in the middle of the tribulation, vv. 15-20, and also at the end of it, v. 29. The Lord will suddenly bring to an end this terrifying period. The return of the Lord to the Mount of Olives is described as 'the great and notable day of the Lord'. This description must not be confused with the term, 'the day of the Lord'. The latter takes in the whole course of the tribulation, but the former is rather a pivotal event in the day of the Lord when Israel's enemies will be dealt with and punished at the second

THE GREAT TRIBULATION

By **JOHN STUBBS** Mayfield, Scotland

advent of the Lord Jesus. The day of the Lord will take in not only the Tribulation, but also the Millennium, and the final event in the day of the Lord, before the eternal bliss and tranquillity begins. It is the last great act of judgement which will embrace the planet and its atmosphere (see 2 Peter 3. 10).

Let us now consider the Great Tribulation as to its commencement, character and climax.

Its Commencement

The tribulation period will commence sometime after the rapture of the church. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, we have important information that greatly helps us to see that the tribulation period cannot commence until three events occur. The apostle is giving reasons in this passage that, contrary to what the Thessalonians had been hearing from others, the day of the Lord ('day of Christ' KJV in verse 2 should read 'the day of the Lord' RV) was not then present. The first reason why this could not be is that the coming of the Lord to the air at the rapture had not yet taken place, v. 1. The second is the apostasy mentioned in verse 3. This is the revolt that will mark the end of the age, when all truth will be abandoned by Israel and Christendom alike. The third is the manifestation of the man of sin, v. 2b. Satan will see to it that this eschatological person will be raised

up. He will achieve worldwide power by military exploits and the putting down of other rulers. In my view, it does not necessarily follow that as soon as the Restrainer is removed, v. 7, then immediately the wicked one will be revealed; rather, that the way will then be clear for the awful development of evil and the initiation by God of His judgements upon the earth after the day of grace has expired, Rev. 6-18. We must be careful here and not insist that only a seven year gap will intervene between the rapture and the Second Advent in glory of Christ to the earth. It certainly appears that the Great Tribulation will cover the last three-and-a-half years of Daniel's seventieth week, but there may well be some time lapse before the last week of Daniel chapter 9 begins.

Its Character

The question might well be asked, 'What is the purpose of the tribulation?' From the Old Testament in particular, we learn that the first phase of the day of the Lord in the period of the tribulation will be one of gloom, darkness and trouble for Israel as a nation. It will be Israel's great testing and humbling process to prepare them for the shock of the revelation of their Messiah. Chronologically, the first reference to the day of the Lord in the Old Testament is Amos chapter 5 verses 8-20, where the prophet rebukes the ideas of the people as to the day of



ULTAION

the Lord and shows that instead of it being a time of victory for Israel over their enemies, it will rather be a period of darkness and inescapable judgement upon themselves. This helpful scripture provides a significant clue as to the nature of the tribulation. Israel will be the special object of divine chastening throughout the course of the tribulation period. This is the same period referred to as 'Jacob's trouble', Jer. 30. 7. We see this pictured in Joseph testing his brethren prior to his revelation to them. Joseph's bride, Asenath, knew nothing of the seven year famine or the testing of Joseph's brethren. She was cared for in the palace by Joseph. So the church, the bride of Christ, will be cherished in heaven, having been taken there by the Lord Jesus before the Tribulation begins, see 1 Thess. 1. 10; 5. 9.

The whole world will suffer in the Tribulation time, but especially Israel, who will experience such suffering as they never have endured in their past history. The Lord Jesus speaks of 'the beginning of sorrows', Matt. 24. 8. This refers back to the conditions mentioned, vv. 4-7, of false Christs, wars, famines and earthquakes, etc. While it is true these things have occurred in the world's history, they will happen to a far greater degree in the tribulation time. The Lord, in His Olivet teaching, says of the first three-and-a-half years of the tribulation, 'All these are the begin-

ning of sorrows', v. 8. The phrase 'beginning of sorrows' was used of the birth pangs of a woman. This is an interesting picture. Israel's suffering in the tribulation is compared by the Lord to the travail of a woman in child-birth. This suggests that the design of the tribulation in regard to Israel will be to change Israel into a new and restored nation.

Its Climax

The seven year tribulation period will have a very sudden and climactic end with the Lord descending in power and glory from heaven. The Second Advent will be the intervention of the Lord Jesus to deal with man's affairs on earth. He will end the tribulation to conquer His enemies, to convert Israel nationally, and to control the world in His millennial reign. Physically and geographically speaking, without any exaggeration, the Lord's feet standing on the Mount of Olives at His revelation in glory will be the most momentous event ever to take place on planet earth. The crisis of Armageddon will be at its height when He returns. Israel as a nation will be on the verge of being destroyed by their many enemies. The Jewish faithful remnant praying and waiting for the Messiah will almost feel all hope has gone. Many of their brethren will have been martyred, while others of them will still be active preaching the coming kingdom. Just before the Lord descends to the earth, God will switch off the lights of creation. There will be great disturbances in the heavenly constellations which will be sandwiched between the end of the Great Tribulation and the Lord's return to earth. From the dark

backdrop of the heavens and the earth He will descend. There will be no need of a spotlight on the Saviour, for all will see Him return to earth in resplendent glory. Just before the Lord comes to the earth the seas and the waves will be roaring and the power of the heavens will be shaken and men's hearts will fail them from fear, Luke 21. 25-26. It will be, for the majority of the population of earth, a most fearful time.

The One whom soldiers abused when here, will, upon His coming, destroy the largest armies ever assembled together. He who had been at His first advent a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes will appear with His vesture dipped in blood. He whose feet were pierced at Calvary will tread His enemies under His feet. In the days of His flesh men took up stones to cast at Him, but when He comes He will see men crying for the mountains and rocks to hide them from His wrath. The Lord who had in His life been the Man of sorrows will come forth in fury and great power as the Man of war. He will inflict punishment on the beast and the false prophet, and cast Satan into the abyss for one thousand years. What a sequel this will all be to the end of the Great Tribulation. Then, after the terrible heat and darkness of the tribulation period, Israel will enjoy times of refreshing from the Lord, and the world, for the first time, will enjoy peace, prosperity and plenty.

JOHN STUBBS is in fellowship in the Mayfield Gospel Hall, Edinburgh, assembly. He has written for the *What the Bible Teaches* Old Testament commentaries and is a regular contributor to the *Believer's Magazine*.



There is a sense of promise and expectation when a young man starts his spiritual life with energy and enthusiasm. Amaziah was twenty-five years old 'when he began to reign', 2 Kgs. 14. 2, and there must have been a combination of relief and expectation in a nation that had seen the sad close of the reign of Jehoash, his father. How encouraging to see a young man who 'did that which was right in the sight of the Lord', v. 3! The narrator notes that his activity was 'not like David his father' but some progress was made. How difficult it is to overcome a legacy of error left by a former generation and get back to that which is based solely upon scripture!

We should note the progress that was made in the early days of the reign of Amaziah. Firstly, he sought to restore justice according to the Mosaic law. Those that had been responsible for his father's death were summarily executed. Such treachery against one who, in spite of his failures, was still the Lord's anointed must be punished. Secondly, he sought to bring some military organization to the people of God so that a chain of command was established. He assessed the strength of the nation and prepared them for conflict against their enemies. Thirdly, when a man of God came to him he listened, and followed the instructions he gave. He may have made an error of judgement in hiring a hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel, but he was prepared to reverse that decision on the advice of the man of God.

In a practical sense, there is much that we can learn from these early activities of Amaziah. He was a man who sought to do what was right. His execution of those that had killed his father could have been far more extensive. For many there would have been a comprehensive slaughter of the offenders and their families. Amaziah, however, applies the law and brings justice rather than retribution. We must not underestimate this action. It is easy when severe hurt has been done, either to yourself or one you love, to react with ferocity rather

Amaziah

— 'thine heart hath lifted thee up'

than with a manner that seeks justice. Amaziah demonstrated considerable self-control. He was also a man who sought to bring a sense of order to the affairs of the nation. Whilst his activities centred upon the military, he was still preparing the people of God for the conflicts they would face – whether from external attack or when seeking to overcome their enemies in battle. Our God is a God of order, and we must attach importance to that order that He seeks us to bring to what we do for Him. An *ad-hoc* and haphazard approach does not befit the people of God. Equally, such an approach displays a weakness which can present an opportunity for attack.

What we might see as one of Amaziah's significant strengths was his willingness to listen to the man of God who brought the word of God. The advice of God's messenger was not only opposed to Amaziah's initial plans, but had a cost of obedience attached to it. It is always difficult to obey when, humanly speaking, the course of action we are required to follow defies human logic. To reduce your army by 100,000 men prior to a major offensive would seem complete folly, yet this is what the man of God told Amaziah to do. Equally, there was a significant cost to obedience. Not only was there the loss of the money invested to hire these mercenaries out of Israel, there was also the diplomatic significance – 'their anger was greatly kindled against Judah', 2 Chr. 25. 10. Again, from a human standpoint, surely there must be some sort of compromise that could be negotiated? But Amaziah listened and obeyed. Here is a significant challenge to all of us.

When the word of God is clear, what possible compromise can we seek to establish? Like Amaziah, we need simply to obey it. If, like Amaziah, we are asked not to fellowship with unbelievers, are we prepared to obey and to separate ourselves from that which might undermine our testimony? The ways of God are not often easy to understand but, as Amaziah discovered, they are for our blessing.

By
JOHN BENNETT
Kirkby-in-Ashfield,
England

Having followed the instructions of the man of God we read that 'he slew of Edom in the valley of salt ten thousand, and took Seir by war', 2 Kgs. 14. 7. Obedience brought blessing in a victory over the enemy. This is a telling thought! If there is weakness or failure in our spiritual life, is it because we are not seeking to be obedient to the word of God? Can we expect to experience a day-to-day victory over the adversary if we are not prepared to bow to what the scriptures teach? Oh for a listening ear and a tender heart!

Fresh from victory over the Edomites there is a sad mistake made by Amaziah. The wise man warned, 'There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up', Prov. 30. 13. It would seem that Amaziah was lifted up in the euphoria of success. What he allowed to take place at the top of the rock, 2 Chr. 25. 12, did not display the same sense of justice of earlier days. However, his failure was seen in one major error, 'he brought the gods of the children of Seir, and set them to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them', v. 14. It seems incredible that a man who had started well should now sink so low. We need to be challenged by



the words of the apostle Paul, 'for when I am weak, then am I strong', 2 Cor. 12. 10. When Amaziah perceived himself to be strong, then, he was incredibly weak!

What compounded Amaziah's error was what followed. God sends a prophet to him. What grace God shows! In the face of a clear breach of the first commandment, God would have been righteous to judge Amaziah forthwith, but, instead, He sends a prophet. Would Amaziah listen, as he had before? What a difference we see now! The ear is closed. The heart is hardened. The prophet is not just ignored, he is threatened with death if he chooses to continue his message. Having chosen a pathway of rebellion, Amaziah now seems intent on pursuing it!

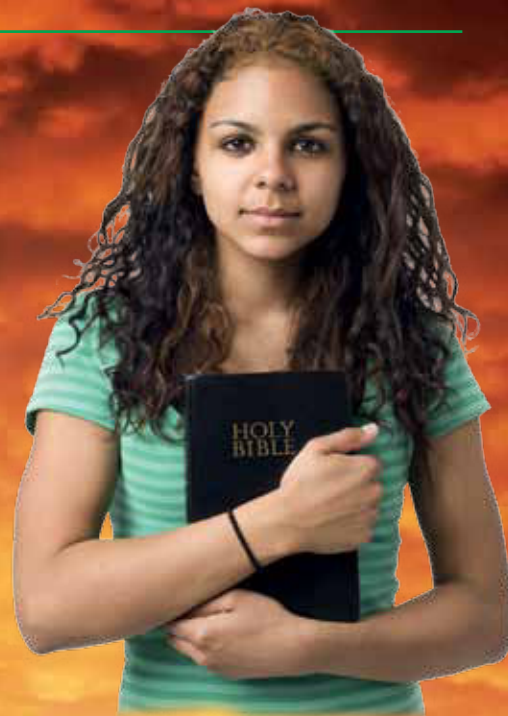
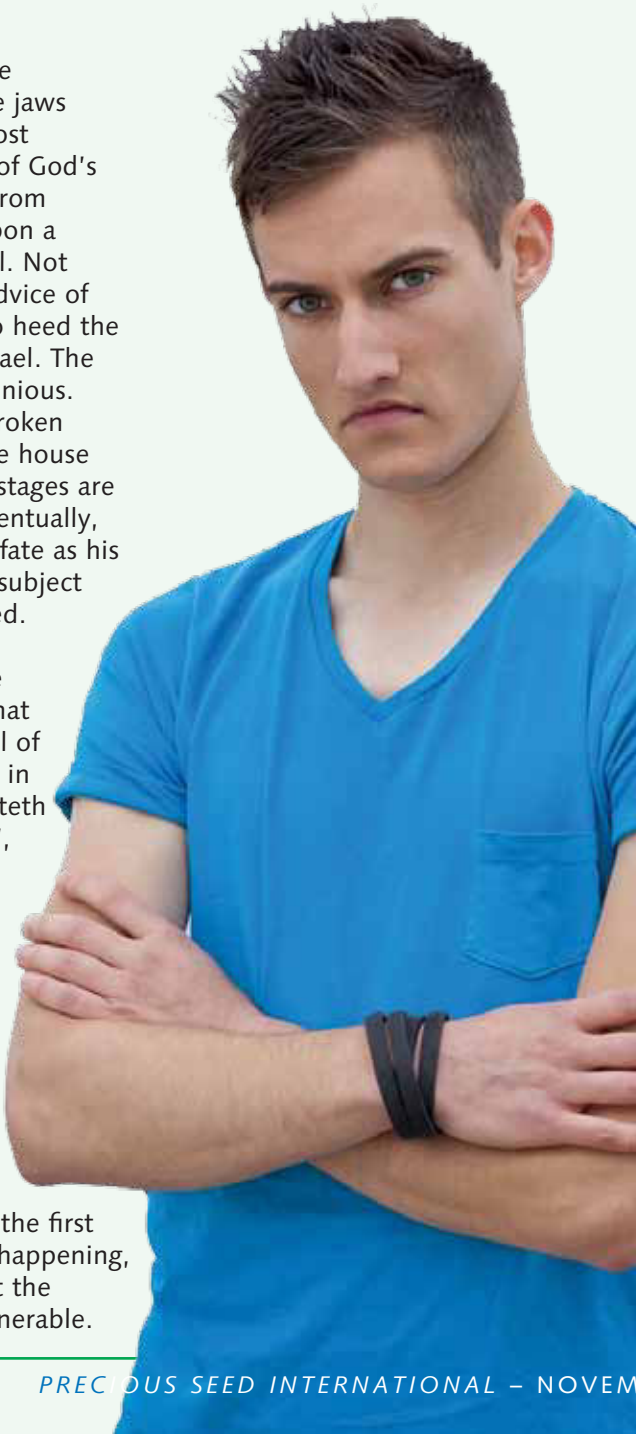
The irony of the phrase 'he snatched defeat out of the jaws of victory' would not be lost here. Ignoring the advice of God's prophet, he takes advice from elsewhere and engages upon a reckless fight against Israel. Not only does he ignore the advice of the prophet but he fails to heed the threat of Joash, king of Israel. The defeat he suffers is ignominious. The wall of Jerusalem is broken down. The treasures of the house of God are plundered. Hostages are taken back to Samaria. Eventually, Amaziah suffers the same fate as his father as he becomes the subject of a conspiracy and is killed.

The psalmist describes the blessedness of the man 'that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful', Ps. 1. 1. The wisdom of those words is found here in the experience of Amaziah. He took and acted upon the advice of the ungodly men. Defeat was the outcome. But personal defeat is not the only outcome. Sadly, the people of God suffer. The walls of Jerusalem are also broken down. This is the first recorded occasion of this happening, and it is an indication that the people of God are left vulnerable.

We should not underestimate the scope of the impact of spiritual failure upon the Lord's people and upon His testimony!

In the lives of the kings of Judah, how often we might reflect upon the fact that so many started well but finished badly. Such is Amaziah. A young man of promise becomes a victim of pride and a haughty spirit. How careful we need to be, not just in our own life but in the spiritual development of others. Based upon the historical lessons of scripture, the apostle sounds the warning, 'Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall', 1 Cor. 10. 12.

JOHN BENNETT is ministry articles editor of *Precious Seed International*.



I'm Justified

God's sovereign grace selected me
To have in heaven a place;
'Twas the good pleasure of His will
I'm justified by grace.

In due time Christ on Calvary died;
Flowed that crimson flood
Which makes the foulest white as snow;
I'm justified by blood.

God raised Him up; this is the pledge,
Should evil doubtings low'r,
His resurrection quells each fear;
I'm justified by power.

The Holy Spirit guided me
To what the scripture saith;
I grasped the truth; Christ died for me!
I'm justified by faith.

Now if you doubt that I am Christ's
If one suspicion lurks,
I'll show by deed that I am His,
I'm justified by works.

I praise the Lord, 'tis all of Him,
The grace, the faith, the blood,
The resurrection power, the works,
I'm justified by God.

*Extracted from Choice Hymns of the Faith.
This hymn written by HELEN H. SHAW*



The title of this article may create the impression that it will focus on the recognition given to those brethren who are already acknowledged as being elders, and who have served in that capacity for a long time. That such men deserve recognition is undeniable, for the scriptures clearly teach that we are to 'esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake', 1 Thess. 5. 13. Similarly, when writing to Timothy, Paul states, 'Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine', 1 Tim. 5. 17.

However, the purpose of this study is to consider a different facet of 'recognizing elders', and there are two prominent matters that will be explored. Firstly, how does a man become an elder? Secondly, how do we recognize those who display the potential to be elders and encourage their development? These are men who do not formally meet with the elders but are manifesting a care for the saints, and are maturing in their Christian experience.

The importance of this subject cannot be overstated, for the paramount need in so many assemblies is for such shepherds. Churches rarely, maybe never, rise above the general tone set by those who lead them, and this ought not to be surprising. An examination of the historical books of the Old Testament reveals that whenever the people had a good leader they prospered spiritually; whenever they had a bad leader, they declined morally and embraced the gods of the heathen.

How does a man become an elder?

In the formative years of my assembly experience, this question was often raised, and the answer that always followed was, 'It is the Spirit of God that makes a man an elder'. This response was correct, for speaking to the elders from Ephesus Paul said, 'Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers', Acts 20. 28. Unfortunately, no one ever clarified for me how the Spirit of God made a man an elder, and I assumed

RECOGNIZING

elders

By **RICHARD COLLINGS** Caerphilly, Wales
(Unless stated otherwise quotations are taken from the New King James Version)

it happened by some very mysterious means!

Two qualities, amongst several others, which must characterize every elder, are recorded in 1 Timothy chapter 3. Those qualities are: a real heart-yearning for the work, v. 1; and the ability to teach, v. 2, although not necessarily always in a public sense. Neither of these features is the outcome of human initiative but is the product of the Spirit of God. He stimulates the desire for the task, and He equips the man with the gift of teaching – and it is by these means the Spirit of God makes a man an elder.

How do we recognize those who display the potential to be elders?

The church of the Thessalonians had not been established very long when Paul wrote to them urging them 'to recognize those who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you', 1 Thess. 5. 12. These new converts were to discern and appreciate those who were standing before (over) them in order to guide and care for them. Already, within this fledgling church, there were men emerging who were demonstrating features that indicated they had been equipped by the Spirit of God to perform the duties of elders.

In the Epistle to Titus the apostle says, 'For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you', Titus 1. 5. This 'appointing' of elders wasn't achieved by voting, or by ordaining in the ecclesiastical sense. Titus' duty was to discern which men revealed the features listed by Paul in the following four verses, and then exhort those in fellowship to recognize such as being divinely enabled elders. About a year after his first missionary journey, Paul and his companions set out to revisit the areas previously evangelized and

in so doing they also 'appointed elders in every church', Acts 14. 23. What Paul did was point out those who had already been doing the work of an elder.

As we collate the details given in Paul's letters to the Thessalonians, to Timothy and to Titus, and observe his actions as recorded by Luke in Acts chapter 14, a clear pattern emerges for us to follow today. We recognize the potential for a man to be an elder because that man starts to display the qualities required of an overseer as set out in the various Epistles.

Although it is a bizarre notion, if it were possible to conduct a conversation with a flock of sheep and ask, 'How do you know who your shepherd is?' they would not struggle for an answer. They would know that there is a world of difference between the behaviour of the shepherd and that of the sheepdog. Even more crucially, they would very quickly realize there is a vast difference between the shepherd who owns the sheep, and the person who is responsible for their slaughter. A shepherd is a man who cares for the flock and is found amongst it, who loves sheep, who ensures the flock is well fed, and gives priority to its security. Accepting the limitations of the metaphor, the same ideas apply in the context of a local church.

How do we encourage the development of elders?

That the Spirit of God makes a man an elder does not absolve those already recognized as overseers from having a duty to encourage and nurture those who are emerging as potential leaders. This practice runs throughout the Bible for there are several instances of men of maturity working in harness with those who are younger, in order to hone their spiritual abilities. For example, Moses worked with Joshua, Elijah with Elisha, and Paul with Timothy.

lders

It is disappointing to observe a reluctance on the part of some older brethren to hand over the reins of responsibility to succeeding generations as though wisdom will die with them. Sadly, the problem goes even deeper than that, for before they hand over duties to those following on they should have been priming them for those days of responsibility. Often, when older men die, there is a vacuum created because they have held on to things far too long, and the next generation have only had experience of certain aspects of an elder's work, because they were not given, or even denied, the opportunity or meeting with fellow elders and sharing the burden of their responsibilities. As it is the purpose of God that each local church should have elders, and that such men are expected to be vigilant, they should be watching over the fellowship to look out for younger brethren who are showing early signs of an aptitude for leadership.

The Spirit of God inspired Paul to write two separate lists of qualities that must be seen in every elder; the first is found in 1 Timothy chapter 3 verses 1-11 and the second in Titus chapter 1 verses 5-9. His objective in Timothy's letter was to establish a standard against which any brother, especially one who desired to be an overseer, could examine himself. His purpose in the letter to Titus was to set out the qualities that others should expect to find in those who wished to be recognized as overseers. These two passages make it easier for mature men to discern those who are beginning to show promise of having a shepherd care, and they ought to draw alongside such to encourage them. In addition, where older brethren are genuinely seeking to follow the scriptural pattern these

two lists will safeguard them from handing things over to someone younger just because he is a family member, close friend or even their 'preferred successor'.

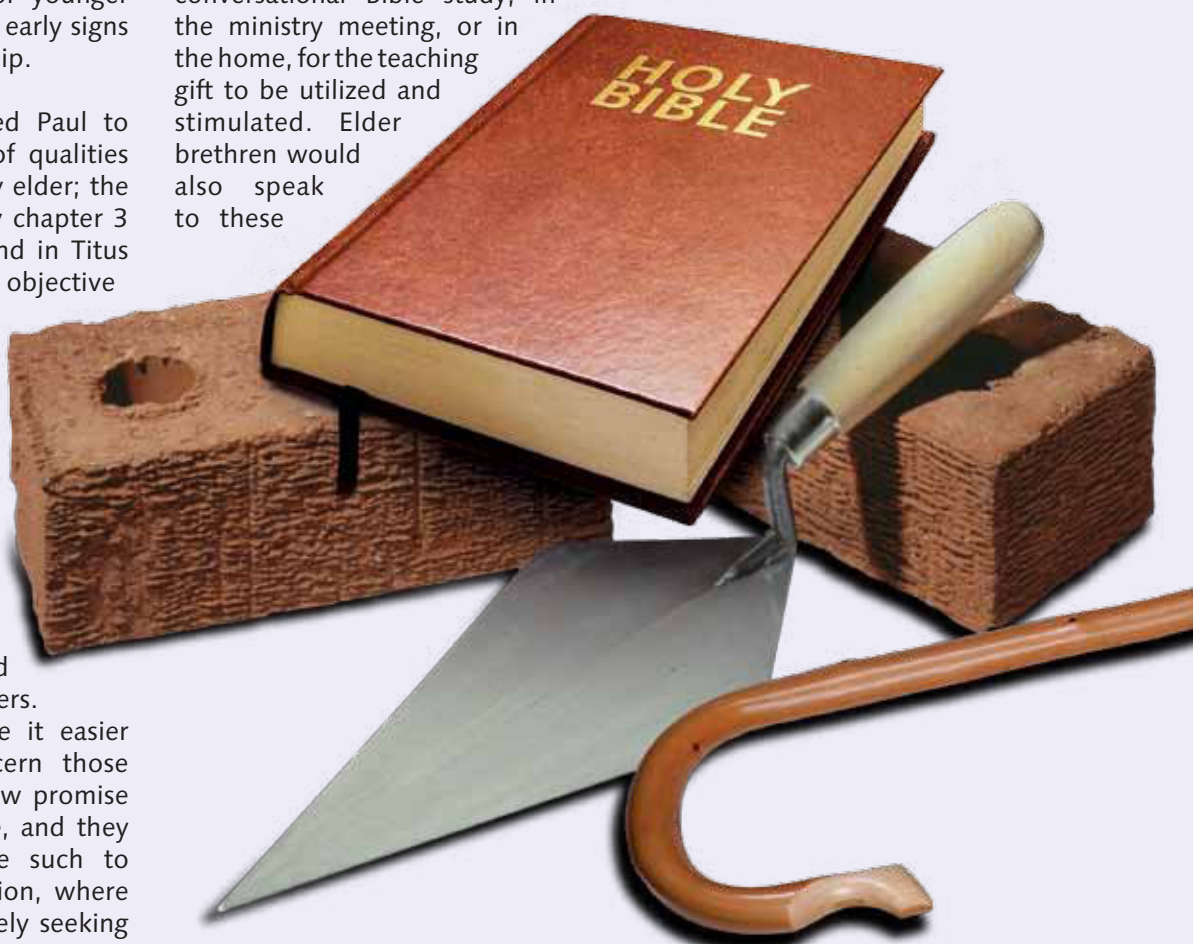
Of course, it is all very well to set things out in a theoretical way but often the practice is more complicated, so we have to determine how this 'nurturing' of future elders can be done in assembly life. As already stated, the existing overseers should be looking out for those who are maturing and who are displaying a care for the saints in the fellowship. They would be watching to see that there is an appreciation of Christ, steadfastness in attendance at the meetings, evidences of a teaching ability, consistency in their testimony, and care for fellow believers. However, they would not be looking for perfection, and they would need to be patient with these brethren as they will make mistakes.

It goes without saying that the elders would spend time in prayer concerning those they see as being successors in this vital work. In addition, they would ensure that opportunities would be created in conversational Bible study, in the ministry meeting, or in the home, for the teaching gift to be utilized and stimulated. Elder brethren would also speak to these

younger men and share with them their joy at seeing their spiritual advancement and inform them that they see them as future overseers. This requires great care, sensitivity, much prayer and a waiting on the Spirit of God. However, as time passes, and progress continues, the elders could transfer certain elements of their workload to these emerging brethren, though much wisdom would need to be used as to what work is passed on. Finally, they would ask such brethren to work with them in all aspects of 'overship' – and when they do so it should not come as a surprise to anyone.

The foregoing is not an exhaustive model. However, it seeks to set out some ways in which help and guidance can be given to brethren who demonstrate a genuine desire to serve the people of God by assuming the onerous and often thankless task of eldership. We have a duty to ensure there is a succession of elders, and steps need to be taken to develop and recognize the next generation of these much needed men.

RICHARD COLLINGS is a member of the Precious Seed Trust and responsible for the Q&A page in the magazine.





The Glory of

The glory of God is the great theme of the ages. It is the reason creation took place, as the heavens declare God's glory and mankind was made for His glory. The grand plan of redemption is all to the glory of God. In dispensational theology, the ultimate purpose, the end point, is that all was and is for the glory of God. The salvation of mankind, as great as it is, becomes secondary to the overriding fact of God's glory.

'Glory' is a word which, though often used, many find difficult to define without using the word in the definition. Even though the word is used in hymns, often in prayer, and is found in various forms close to 400 times in scripture, it remains hard to describe. Believers usually have a general idea of the meaning but lack a precise definition.

God is said to be jealous of His glory, 'My glory will I not give to another', Isa. 42. 8. God is called the '**God of glory**', both in Psalm 29 verse 3 and in Acts chapter 7 verse 2. This formula is used with each member of the Trinity. In Ephesians chapter 1 verse 17 it is '**the Father of glory**'; in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 8 and James chapter 2 verse 1 '**the Lord of glory**'; and, in 1 Peter 4 verse 14 '**the Spirit of glory**'. In Psalm 24 verses 7-10, there are four references to the **King of glory**, looking forward to the coming of Christ.

In the Old Testament glory conveys the thought of splendour, beauty, or, of someone or something being awesome. This is why Joseph could speak of the glory of His power and position, Gen. 45. 13. Psalm 19 verse 1 states, 'The heavens declare the glory of God'; the immensity of it is an awesome and a fitting display

of God's splendour. The children of Israel saw the glory of God in the cloud, Exod. 16. 10, and on the mount, 24. 17. The glory of God was seen filling the tabernacle, 40. 34, 35. Similarly, both Isaiah and Ezekiel saw a vision of God's glory.

W. E. VINE defines the New Testament use of the word, 'glory', as having to do with an opinion or estimation, 'the honour resulting from a good opinion'. So, when believers give God glory they are expressing their estimation of His worth. God revealing His glory is the expression of what He is like, whether through the revelation of His grandeur, in the Person of Christ, or in the whole work of redemption. VINE states, 'It is used of the nature and acts of God in self-manifestation, i.e., what He essentially is and does, as exhibited in whatever way He reveals Himself'.

Using the principle of first mention, the word 'glory' is found for the first time in Genesis chapter 31 verse 1, describing Jacob's wealth. Here the King James Version has the word 'glory', while the NKJV translates the word as 'wealth'. This reference in and of itself does not convey much information, but, when looked at in the light of the second mention of 'glory', the concept becomes intriguing. Genesis chapter 45 verse 13 speaks of Joseph's glory in Egypt. Thus, in these first two references there is the father's glory and the son's glory. The glory, or wealth, has come to the father by right and the son has received glory by virtue of his character and conduct. The son is seen on the throne exercising dominion over the nations. His command to the brothers is, 'Tell my father of all my glory . . . that ye have seen', v. 13.

Rich are the devotional thoughts that emerge when these ideas are applied to the Father and the Son. Just as in Genesis chapter 31 the glory of this world belongs to the Father, there is the continuing conflict with the children of this world wanting that glory and viewing it as their own. Genesis chapter 45 verses 8-13 pictures the fact that the Son will be given glory and honour and His reign shall be glorious. The suffering Servant who toiled in humility will be the exalted Sovereign, and 'he shall bear the glory', Zech. 6. 13. His own brethren will bow to Him and acknowledge His Person and position.

Believers in both Testaments are called to give God glory, that is, to declare our estimation of His Person and work. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks the question, 'What is the chief end of man?' The answer is, 'The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever'. To glorify God becomes an integral part of worship, the expressing of the weight of opinion given to who He is, and what He has done. Psalm 96 verses 6 and 7 say that His people are to 'give to the Lord the glory due his name' as He is worshipped in 'the beauty of holiness'.

Since God's glory is one of the great themes of scripture, it is fitting that we, like Moses, be occupied with it and should cry out with him, 'Please, show me Your glory', Exod. 33. 18 NKJV. David expressed a similar thought in Psalm 27 verse 4, 'One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple'. The question to ask ourselves is: would this be the single greatest desire in my life?



God (1)

By **GARY McBRIDE** London, Ontario, Canada

Before Moses made his request he had prayed, 'Show me now Your way, that I may know You', Exod. 33. 13 NKJV. Moses has three requests in his conversations with God in this section of the book. In Exodus chapter 32 verse 32 it is a plea for pardon. In chapter 33 verse 14 it is a request for God's presence to go with them in their travels. The higher and nobler desire is expressed in the verses quoted, 33. 13 and 18, in the prayer that he might know more of God's Person. All believers know what it is to be pardoned; some believers experience the joy of His presence with them day by day; but relatively few reach the place of occupation with the Person of God as expressed in Moses' request.

Chapter 33 verses 21-23 describe the particulars of the visible revelation of God's glory. The eternal and invisible God makes Himself known to His servant. It was while Moses was in the cleft of the rock that he was able to see the visible display of the radiance of God's Person and presence. Moses would only be able to see the back of God, or the effect of God passing, as no one can see God in His fullness and live.

God's verbal response to Moses' request has more to do with His radiance than with His character. God speaks of His attributes and also of His activities man-ward. God starts with a declaration of His goodness, 33. 19. This word is often translated in English by the word 'lovingkindness'.

In chapter 34, God starts this Theophany by proclaiming His name, v. 5. He next declares His character, vv. 6-7. These are characteristics that make the God of heaven unique and that distinguish Him from

the gods invented by man. Note the features, 'merciful and gracious, longsuffering, abounding in goodness and truth'. Synonyms might include words like compassion, grace, mercy, love, patience and faithfulness. God then reveals aspects of His conduct that flow from, and are consistent with, His character. In the Septuagint the beginning of verse 7 reads, 'And keeping justice and mercy for thousands, taking away iniquity, and unrighteousness, and sins; and he will not clear the guilty'. The character of God is such that He is merciful and willing to forgive but, to be consistent, He must also judge the guilty.

The practical effect of this experience and the revelation of God's glory are twofold in Moses' life. 'So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped', v. 8. Moses was speechless, but in awe and humility bowed and worshipped. This is the God-ward response to a glimpse of God's glory.

The man-ward aspect is seen in verses 29-35 in that Moses' face shone with such brilliance that no one could bear to stand before him. In fact, Moses had to veil his face. Rabbinical tradition says that this was true for the balance of his life. Out of the experience in the cleft of the rock it was obvious to all that Moses had been in the very presence of God, for his face reflected the glory of God.

The New Testament commentary on this scene is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verses 7-18. There was a wonderful display of glory on Sinai at the giving of the law. This was extended to the radiance that shone from the face of Moses. In fact, this display was tied to the whole 'glorious' ministry of the law.

Paul explains that the veil covered Moses' face, because the radiance faded over time. It was a temporary display, but the veil hid that fact from the children of Israel. They did not see that the glory was fading, pointing to the passing of the law and the greater glory associated with the Spirit's ministry in this age.

The glory the believer sees today comes from viewing the Son of God in the word of God. Our 'cleft of the rock' is the time spent in the word. The Spirit of God then takes the thoughts of Christ and applies them to the child of God, which results in transformation into the image of Christ. This is a process that takes place incrementally, from one degree of glory to another. For us the glory of Christ is more than a reflection; rather, it radiates from within, and can then be seen by the world.

Having a focus on God's glory will affect both our worship of God and our witness to the world. Being aware of the awesomeness of God produces wonder and worship. Awe and wonder are the basis of worship, and though there is no lack of wonders, there is a serious lack of wonder, and, therefore, a declining emphasis on worship.

Our testimony to the world is directly tied to our private devotional life. It is from the time spent in 'the cleft of the rock' that individuals are transformed into the image of Christ. His glory is then seen every day in our character, conversation and conduct.

GARY McBRIDE is a commended full-time worker, ministering mainly in Ontario, Canada. Commended by the Greenwood assembly, Toronto, he is now in fellowship in an assembly in London, Ontario, Canada. This is his third article for *Precious Seed International*.



Just like any assembly-based work, be it gospel or ministry, your website should never stand in isolation. Firstly, it should be supported by the entire assembly; not just in helping with contributing content, but in praying for and encouraging those who are involved in it. Secondly, and probably most importantly, it should not be something that happens once and then is forgotten about. Very often we have 'special efforts', but in failing to follow up any successes, we find opportunities are missed and precious contacts are lost.

We see examples of this in the New Testament, and Paul's Letter to the Philippians, is an example. Paul had visited there on his second missionary journey and had seen the first church in Europe established. However, after his departure it was by no means the end of his dealings with that church.

'I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy', Phil. 1. 2-3. Paul makes it very clear that his thoughts and prayers are filled with the believers at Philippi. The same should be said of any work that we are involved in, not just that of a website. Paul is taking personal ownership of the work and ensuring that he follows it up and sends help where he can. The same should be said of us when we involve ourselves in any work. A deep personal desire, with the investment of time and effort, generates a connection that pushes us on to see that work succeed, more than any passing acquaintance with the task will ever do.

In order to keep people coming back to your site, a constant stream of fresh, new content is crucial. You may have the best-looking site in the world, but without anything new on it your users will soon dry up. We have talked in previous articles about the different types of content that can be put up. However, it's important to remember that what will work for one site, may not work for another; understanding your audience is key to your success.

CREATING AN ASSEMBLY WHAT NEXT

In order to achieve that and see your site succeed, you have to analyse it. There are a great many tools that are free to add on to your site that will enhance your understanding of what is going on and help you to improve it.

Google Analytics is a package provided by Google that logs a wide range of information about the people who visit your site and generates rich statistical information. All it takes is the inclusion of a small piece of code on each of your pages and you're up and running. These analytics, for example, can tell you how many people are visiting your site, what they are looking at, what country they are looking at it from, and even how long they spent on the site. By studying these statistics you can get an understanding of what does and doesn't work on your site.

As you start to gain an understanding of your audience, don't be afraid to be very critical of your work. Inevitably, there will be some material that just doesn't seem to engage people. If that is the case, either stop producing that kind of material, or simply try to come at it from a different angle. This does not mean watering down the message but challenging yourself critically to target your material at those you are trying to reach. Equally, there will be some content that will succeed, in which case use that as an indication of where your time is better spent. It must be recognized that writing for the web is a skillset all of its own and vastly different from that held by many. In much the same way as studying scripture helps us to understand God, time spent studying your material and a healthy dose of trial and error will see your content grow, and your ability as well.

To this point your site has been mostly 'unidirectional'. In other words, you put up the content and the users read it. However, as your site becomes established, and you start to gain a

steady stream of people coming back to the site, you may wish to try and engage with your users in some form. This course of action requires careful consideration, as it can either make or break not only your website, but also your impact in the community in which you are placed. There are a variety of different methods that you can use to engage with people, each with its own positives or negatives.

The first is a simple 'contact us' section on your site that will allow users to contact you. This can be your address with the expectation that they will come to you should they need to. Unfortunately, our expectation that people will seek us out is somewhat unfounded and, as society goes deeper into the information revolution, our availability for a couple of hours on a Sunday no longer meets the needs of those around us. Most commonly, this page will include some kind of form that allows a user to fill it out and email you directly. Direct email offers a bridge between you and the community and means they can contact you at any time of the day or night, and you have the ability to respond in your own time.

Many will use a similar kind of functionality to offer to send a Bible to anyone who wishes it. This is a great way to get God's word out into the community and gain contacts, with the incentive of a 'free gift'. However, I would sound a note of caution. Decide, prior to making this available, what the 'terms and conditions' are for a free Bible. Do you want to offer it to those in your local community? Are you happy to send to anyone in the country? How many will you send at any one time? Whilst our desire should always be to see the distribution of God's word to the homes of everyone, we have to take into consideration the resources we have and the limitations they put on such a service.

Facebook is one of the latest services





SEMBLY WEBSITE (4)

OW?

By **ANDREW MILLAR**
Kennoway, Fife, Scotland

[Unless otherwise stated, all quotations are taken from the New King James version of the Bible]

that can help you to engage with your audience. One man recently said he found it impossible to contact his daughter by email. When questioned as to why this was, she simply replied that she never checks her email. However, as he switched to using Facebook, he could now expect an almost instantaneous reply from her. As of 2011, Facebook was used by a startling 1 in 13 people in the world. 48% of 18-34 year olds check Facebook when they wake up in the morning, with 28% doing it before they even get out of their bed. The most startling fact of all is that 57% of people talk to others more online than they do in real life.

Engagement with Facebook is easy. Simply set up a page on Facebook dedicated to your assembly, and then start putting content up. It could be upcoming events, latest news, some verses of scripture, or whatever you feel is appropriate. It's not only you that can put up content on this page, people who 'Like' your page can comment on whatever you put up. At best, this serves as a fantastic way to get quick feedback on a variety of issues. However, as always, we need to sound a note of caution. Make sure you keep an eye on your Facebook page and monitor what people are uploading. Hopefully, you will get people who are always complimentary and agree with your point of view, but you can get people who don't and can publish content that is not fit for public consumption. Whilst this is unfortunate, it can also be an area of unexpected opportunity. The natural reaction is to simply take the content down, and, in some cases, this is the only course of action worth taking. However, sometimes it can allow you to engage with people in order to put forward your case and explain from scripture why you believe what you have stated. A greater impact may be made by publicly debating a point rather than simply deleting all content that does not fit. What it shows to users is that you are open,

and willing to engage with them and speak openly about your faith. Shutting down all opposing views can often have the effect of driving your users away, instead of bringing them in. Just be careful that it doesn't spiral out of control. If it does, you may have to politely inform the user that you feel that the conversation is not in the general public's interest, and offer to allow them to message you directly if they wish to continue it.

As we draw these articles to a close I hope that you have been encouraged to create a site, or simply progress with a site that you already have 'up and running'. Whilst it can be daunting, if we are to see the gospel flourish in the future, the web is going to have to become a medium in which we operate. With over one billion web-enabled phones activated last year alone, those in the community around us will increasingly look for 24/7 engagement with us using a variety of different methods. We should not be afraid of this, nor shy away from it. By embracing these developments we can ensure that the future of the web can be influenced and exploited by God's people, and not dominated by those who seek to destroy Christian witness and values.

ANDREW MILLAR is in fellowship in the assembly at the Arnot Gospel Hall, Kennoway, Fife, Scotland.





UNVEILED - THE HISTORY OF THE KINGDOM

(II) THE PARABLES OF THE CONTAMINATION OF THE KINGDOM

By **JOHN GRIFFITHS** Port Talbot, Wales

Parable No. 2	The Wheat and the Tares	False Disciples
Parable No. 3	The Mustard Seed	False Development
Parable No. 4	The Leaven	False Doctrine

Parable No. 2 – The Wheat and the Tares vv. 24-30; 36-43 – False Disciples

This is not the kingdom in its purity and genuine composition. This is what the kingdom has become, due to infiltration and the enemy's work. Profession of a religious sort is stealthily introduced.

The Sower

This time we are left in no doubt who the sower is. He is the Son of Man, v. 37.

The Seed

The good seed is equated with the children of the kingdom. The genuine subjects of the kingdom are sown in the field, that is, the King places His subjects wherever He wants them on the face of the earth. 'The field is the world', v. 38. An example of this is seen in the 'diaspora', the scattering of believers belonging to the Jerusalem assembly far and wide. Peter writes to 'the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia', 1. 1. The word 'scattered' is our word 'sown'. They were not randomly scattered, due to persecution, but moved to other parts under the sovereign act of God.

The Sleep

'But while men slept'. Though there is no criticism of those that slept, for sleep is a legitimate and necessary process, there are occasions when folk slept when they should have been wide awake. The need for spiritual alertness is seen and the disciples asleep in the garden of Gethsemane illustrates the need to remain awake, alert and watchful.

The Sphere (of sowing)

'The field is the world', v. 38.

The Subtlety

Satan, the enemy, has been busy while

men slept. How cunning the devil is! If this is a night scene, Satan performs his nefarious deed under cover of darkness.

The Spurious

The wheat represents the children of the kingdom; 'the tares are the children of the wicked one'. Satan is counterfeiting the genuine. The tares are an imitation of the wheat, until the fruit appears. Then the distinction becomes apparent. The devil is a past master at counterfeiting. He has imitated the gospel, Gal. 1. 6-9; he has imitated believers, the wheat and the tares; he has imitated the church, Rev. 17; and he will soon imitate Christ, with the antichrist. The tares represent religious profession. Christ described religious hypocrites thus, 'Ye are of your father the devil'. The wheat and the tares are allowed to grow side by side in the world. There is no support here for saved and unsaved to grow side by side in the assembly, though.

The Separation and Severance

The separation of wheat and tares takes place at 'the end of the world', or, better, 'the consummation of the age'. This equates with the time of our Lord's return to earth. It cannot refer to the rapture; this takes place at the end of a dispensation not the end of the age. Further, angels are the reapers and the tares are dealt with before the wheat. The tares are 'gathered out' for burning. The wheat is gathered into the barn, i.e., the millennial kingdom.

The Servants

The servants are the angels. They are linked with Christ in relation to future judgements. In this chapter they are associated with Christ in judgement in the parable of the dragnet.

The Sentence

'And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and

gnashing of teeth', v. 42. Eternal punishment, however unpalatable to modern man, is a fundamental plank of Bible truth.

The Shining

'The righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father', v. 43. 'And they that be mine shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever', Dan. 12. 3.

The genuine will enjoy millennial blessedness. The cameo of the coming millennial kingdom witnessed by Peter, James and John at the Mount of Transfiguration portrays Jesus with glowing face and glistening garments. The saints will almost certainly share these features in the millennium.¹ The 'kingdom of their Father' is the millennial kingdom. The use of different expressions involving different persons of the Godhead does not imply three distinct kingdoms.²

The wheat and the tares (darnel) can only be distinguished by experts prior to the appearance of the fruit. Pulling them up before harvest is not recommended as their root systems become so intertwined. Once the fruit appears, separation is easily undertaken. The wheat has its golden ear of corn. The darnel's fruit is black and poisonous to humans.

Parable No. 3 – The Mustard Seed, vv. 31, 32 – False Development

The Sower

The identity of the sower, as in the first parable is not stated. However, the similarity of the second parable, 'a man which sowed good seed', with this parable, 'a man took and sowed', is strong evidence that the sower is the Son of Man.

The Seed

What crop was expected in the first parable we are not told, but it is wheat in the second and mustard seed here.

The Size

It is the contrast that is remarkable

INGDOM OF HEAVEN (3)

F THE KINGDOM

between the size of the seed and the spread of the shrub. The sower expected a bush but got a tree! Whether the mustard seed was the smallest seed or not, it was the accepted wisdom of the time.³

The kingdom stemmed from a small beginning; Christ, the twelve and the seventy. The expected growth was to be shrub-like not tree-like. The question of the disciples – 'Are there few that be saved'? – only reinforces the expectation.

Why the abnormal growth? The kingdom's exceptional growth is due to the addition of religious professors. The genuine and counterfeit, the wheat and the tares, exist side by side in the kingdom.

'And becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches'. Both Ezekiel and Daniel use trees to represent kingdoms, Ezek. 17; Dan. 4. The tree represents the kingdom as inclusive of confession and profession, possessors and professors. A comparison of verses 4 and 19 leads us to believe the birds are Satan's agents or emissaries in the first parable, hence here too. The kingdom of heaven is now so extensive, so broad that Satan's representatives 'lodge in the branches thereof'. This expansion, almost explosion, in the volume of the kingdom began with the Emperor Constantine. State and church were merged causing abnormal growth.⁴

On a practical note, this state of affairs should make us wary of Christendom. There has never been a greater need for separation from the pernicious religious system all about us than there is today.

Parable No. 4 – The Leaven, v. 33 – False Doctrine

The three features of this parable are the meal, the leaven and the woman.

The Meal

This consisted of three measures or an ephah. The law of first mention takes us to Genesis chapter 18 verse 6 where Abraham presses Sarah to 'make ready quickly three measures of fine

meal . . . and make cakes'. The Lord and two of His angels have called in for lunch.⁵

The meal offering was significant for the fact that leaven was prohibited. The only exception being in Leviticus chapter 23 verses 15-21 where the two loaves symbolize Jew and Gentile in the church on the day of Pentecost. Until the rapture sin will always be present in believers' lives.

The meal offering represents Christ in His perfect humanity, holy, harmless and undefiled.

The Leaven

Leaven, or yeast, is used for puffing things up, such as making bread rise. It also has great permeating power. 'A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump', is Paul's comment, 1 Cor. 5. 6.

Though leaven is prohibited in relation to the offerings and the feast of unleavened bread in the Old Testament, it is always used literally. Only in the New Testament is it used literally and metaphorically.⁶

Leaven not only puffs up, and permeates but it also adulterates. In this parable the meal is adulterated with leaven. W. E. VINE'S *Expository Dictionary* concludes, 'the history of Christendom confirms the fact that the pure meal of the doctrine of Christ has been adulterated with error'. Beware of false teaching from the cults and their clerics particularly where it impinges on the Person of Christ.

The Woman

A sister who is subject to God and His word is a real treasure but a woman out of her place is a serious danger. The scriptures are clear as to the role of the sister in an assembly. The opportunity to teach publicly is denied to the godly sister. Yet, here, we discover a woman who surreptitiously introduces leaven into the meal knowing that quickly the whole lump would be leavened. She is deliberately contaminating teaching about Christ with false

doctrine. The whole of the kingdom of heaven will be affected by this action.⁷

What a contrast with Mary, Dorcas, Phoebe, and other named sisters who helped Paul. Thank God for sisters like these in our assemblies today!

Endnotes

- 1 This is hinted at in the description of the bride, the Lamb's wife. Her garments are 'clean and white'. 'White' here is bright or radiant.
- 2 This may be illustrated by three references to Christ and the drinking of wine in the coming kingdom. 'My Father's kingdom', Matt. 26. 29; 'the kingdom of God', Mark 14. 25; 'My kingdom', Luke 22. 30. All refer to the millennial kingdom on earth.
- 3 As illustrated in Matthew chapter 17 verse 20, 'faith as a grain of mustard seed'.
- 4 However, the identification of the birds of the air with Satan's agents is reinforced by referring to Genesis chapter 15; Jeremiah chapter 5 verse 27; Isaiah chapter 34 verses 11-15 and Revelation chapter 18 verse 2. This last reference is particularly meaningful, 'the cage of every unclean and hateful bird'. The verse mentions demons, spirits and birds. The birds clearly are not literal birds but of the same order as demons and spirits. The kingdom, embracing profession, includes all manner of false cults and their teachings; these are the birds, Satan's agents.
- 5 Further examples of this quantity of meal may be seen in Judges chapter 6 verses 19-21; 1 Samuel chapter 1 verse 24 and Ezekiel chapter 45 verse 24.
- 6 See Matt. 16. 6, 11; Mark 8. 15; 1 Cor. 5. 6-8; and Gal. 5. 9.
- 7 Concerning women out of their place, think of Jezebel; the whore, Babylon the Great; the woman with the ephah, 'this is wickedness'; Rev. 2. 20; 17. 3, 18; Zech. 5. 7. Historically, review some of the following: Ellen White, Seventh Day Adventism; The Fox Sisters, Spiritism; Mary Baker Eddy, Christian Science; Mdme. Helena Blavatsky, Theosophy; Ann Lee, The Shakers; Agnes Oozman (America), Tongues Revival.

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A WORD FOR TODAY

Καταλιθαζω (katalithazo) stone to death

Καταλλαγή, ης,ς (katallagé) reconciliation

Καταλλάσσω (katallassô) reconcile

In SHAKESPEARE's historical play 'Richard the Third', the Duke of Buckingham makes the following comment to the queen, 'Ay, madam: he (Richard) desires to make atonement between the Duke of Gloucester and your brothers'. Our modern understanding of this would be that the king wanted to resolve the differences between the parties and effect reconciliation. This play was written in the sixteenth century, and provides evidence that the noun 'atonement' in English often came to mean 'reconciliation', hence the reason why the translators of the King James Bible, following TYNDALE, chose to translate the Greek word **katallagé** in this way in Romans chapter 5 verse 11. But, technically, **katallagé** was not equivalent to the main Hebrew term **kaphar**, translated atonement in the Old Testament. TYNDALE chose to use the word **katallagé** in his 1534 New Testament to emphasize the idea that reconciliation brought 'at-one-ment' between parties, so it would have been the best New Testament word to describe the *purpose* of the atonement, i.e. reconciliation.¹ The correct dynamic Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word **kaphar** is **hilasterios** used in the Septuagint (LXX) to translate the mercy seat, Exod. 25. 17, which formed part of the Ark of the Covenant. It was here that the High Priest sprinkled the blood on the Day of Atonement, Lev. 16. 14. The word **hilasterios** can also mean to placate someone's anger, e.g., Jacob propitiates Esau, Gen. 32. 20.

In Judaism God is thought to be reconciled to man by the exchange of His wrath for grace. This is illustrated in 2 Maccabees chapter 1 verse 5, where God is reconciled to His people through prayer, and, in chapter 7 verse 33, where the chastening of God towards His people ultimately leads to their being reconciled to Him. Rabbinical tradition follows this broad concept by applying it to both reconciliation with God and fellow man. Josephus records how Samuel besought God all night to be reconciled to Saul, and not be angry with him.² What these occurrences suggest is that the term reconciliation was used generally in antiquity to describe a change of state or relationship, whereby some form of hostility was replaced by friendship. And we will see that it is in this sense that the noun **katallagé**, and its associated terms, are used mainly by the Apostle Paul in the New Testament, providing us with one of the most profound themes in the whole of the Bible. As JAMES PACKER writes, 'For it is not too much to say that to Paul reconciliation was the sum and substance of the gospel. In his hands, reconciliation became in effect a theological technical term, describing and interpreting the central fact of the Christian message – the saving work of God wrought through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ'.³

In terms of its use in the New Testament, the word occurs in Matthew 5 verse 24 to describe the reconciliation of individuals where an offence has

been committed by one party. The text indicates that the responsibility to achieve reconciliation is placed directly on the party who caused the offence. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 11, an estranged wife is commanded not to remarry ('stay as you are') or, better still, be reconciled to her husband. The inference here is that as the wife has been disobedient to the Lord's commandment, i.e., there has been a failure to obey verse 10; the responsibility is placed upon her to be reconciled to her husband. So in both instances, it is the offender who is obliged to make reconciliation. This is in stark contrast to Paul's use of the word when he speaks of reconciliation between humanity and God. It is man who has given the

offence to God, Col. 1. 21, yet it is God who, though offended, takes the initiative by providing a means of reconciliation through the death of Christ, Rom. 5. 10. In his clarification of justification by faith, Paul states that reconciliation is one of the many benefits that we receive through our Lord Jesus Christ, Rom. 5. 11. But this gift of reconciliation was not achieved through an exchange of money; it came, as JAMES PACKER states, 'by means of a judicial exchange; him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him', 2 Cor. 5. 21 RV. Paul has just affirmed that reconciliation means the non-imputation of their trespasses to the trespassers; here he shows that the ground of this non-imputation is the imputing of their trespasses to Christ, and His bearing God's holy reaction to them'.⁴ Not only are we reconciled to God through Christ, but Paul reminds us in Colossians chapter 1 verse 20 that this reconciliation is both cosmic and universal in its comprehensiveness. It has also made it possible for both Jew and Gentile to be reconciled to God, and to become one unique body in Christ, Eph. 2. 11-19.

What, then, should our response be to God who has taken away this enmity between us through the cross of Christ? Surely it must be that as we have been reconciled to God, so we need to be exercised in the ministry of reconciliation, and, as ambassadors for Christ, plead with men and woman of our generation to be reconciled to God, 2 Cor. 5. 19-21!

*His word shall not fail you He promised;
Believe Him, and all will be well:
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell.*

HELEN H LEMMELL

For further reading/study

Introductory

J. I. PACKER, *18 Words – The Most Important Words You Will Ever Know*

Advanced

R. P. MARTIN, *Reconciliation. A Study of Paul's Theology*

Endnotes

- 1 Note that W.E. VINE rejects this view as being entirely fanciful, but there is no doubt that historically this is thought to be the most likely explanation – see for example the comments of R. C. TRENCH at pages 273/274 in *Synonyms of the New Testament*.
- 2 *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 6 /Chapter 7 (143) Whiston Edition.
- 3 *18 Words – The Most Important Words You Will Ever Know*, pg. 117



1 John chapter 3

Cycle 2: Revelation of the Children of God

Chapter 2 verse 29 marks a new cycle in the letter. The previous cycle described the eternal life introduced in the Prologue, 1. 1-4, in terms of fellowship with divine Persons and one another. In Cycle 2 the twin focus on the *family of God* on the one hand, and the *world* on the other is maintained, but with further development of ideas. Our behaviour constitutes a true test of whose children we are – either God's or the devil's. Socially, the *brotherly love* of the Christian is brought out. As far as opposition is concerned, the world is seen not now in its seductive potential, drawing away our affection from the Father, but rather in its settled *hatred* of, and *hostility* to, the believer. Just as Cycle 1 ends with warnings of 'antichrists', 2. 18-28, Cycle 2 ends¹ with warnings about 'false spirits', 4. 1-6. As the cycle proceeds we encounter further forthright moral and social tests of our Christian profession.

The Character of God's Children: Test – Righteousness, 2. 29 – 3. 10a

The Children of God and their Hope, 2. 29 – 3. 3

The second cycle starts at the climax of the first: at Christ's coming, His people will finally be seen for what they already are – children of God.

2. 29 If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him. The righteousness of God is a fundamental biblical truth.² In His 'Sermon on the Mount' our Lord clearly taught that children of the heavenly Father reproduce His character, Matt 5. 45, 48. To claim to be of that family yet fail to behave accordingly is, therefore, bogus. God is Father only to those in whom He recognizes His own likeness. Moreover, the practice of right living is not simply down to our resolve: for John it follows directly from the new birth, **born of Him**.

3. 1 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! In considering the phenomenon of the new birth, and its result of sinful men brought into relationship with God, John is thrilled at the wonder of it all and issues the command: **Behold**. Reminding us of Paul's outbursts of praise,³ John writes with his soul full of worship and adoring wonder. There is surely a lesson here that truth rightly grasped should not merely inform the mind, but move us to praise, and inspire loyal service.

This conferred status **that we should be called children of God** is a compelling indication of the Father's **love**. 'What manner of' (Gk. *potamos*) means literally 'what foreign or alien kind of' and implies astonishment (PLUMMER) and usually admiration (VINE), Matt 8. 27, Mark 13. 1; Luke 1. 29. Those loved with such amazing love should be amazing persons, 2 Pet. 3. 11! John is ransacking vocabulary to find words adequate to describe this unworldly, heavenly love which our Father has shown us. **Called** (Gk. *kaleo*), is especially used of titles of honour, which indicate the possession of a certain dignity, Matt 5. 9; Luke 1. 76. The RV, NKJV margin, and others, add on good textual authority⁴ **and**

such we are: not only do we have the status and dignity of being *called* the children of God, but we already enjoy the reality – that is what we *are*, no matter how little the world may understand it.

Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Whilst some take 'Him' to refer to the Father, the context points rather to Christ. This is no excuse for secret discipleship, John 19. 38; rather, the verse is teaching that it is no great surprise that the world does not recognize believers for what they are and their high destiny – the world did not even recognize the Son of God when He came.⁵

v. 2 Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, We are *already* the children of God. In contrast to Paul who brings out the truth of *sonship* by adoption, throughout John's writings believers are designated *children*, hence the section headings throughout this exposition. He focuses on their generation by the new birth. 'Son' (Gk. *huios*) is a term reserved by John for Christ alone, the Only-begotten. It **has not yet been manifested what we shall be**. There is, however, an ongoing work of sanctification in the believer's experience, beholding the glory of Christ, and then 'reflecting it as in a mirror', thus being 'transfigured into his likeness', 2 Cor. 3. 18.

but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. The sight of the glorified Christ will completely *transform* us⁶ into His image: 'And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly', 1 Cor. 15. 49.

v. 3 And everyone who has this hope in Him (Christ) purifies himself, just as He (Christ) is pure. The hope of the believer is set on Christ. There is emphasis here on 'He' (Gr. *ekeinos*) 2. 6; 3. 3, 7 – Christ is the epitome of purity: what is true of Christ in the absolute should be true of the believer *progressively*. The verb 'purify' (Gk. *hagnizo*) is used in the Old Testament of priestly purification, but here carries a moral and ethical sense. He whose goal is the coming of Christ will constantly examine himself for that which defiles, 'resisting every defiling influence and keeping oneself free from it' (VINE). Again, we have a test of authentic Christianity.

The Children of God and the Character of Sin, 3. 4-10a

In this section the apostle continues to unfold a *moral* test for the children of God. We encounter a number of compelling reasons why the life of a Christian must always be opposed to sin:

1. in view of the essential nature of sin, v. 4;
2. in view of the Person and work of Christ, vv. 5, 7;
3. in view of the divine origin of the believer's life, vv. 9-10a;
4. the devil is the source of sin, vv. 8-10a.

In these verses it is highly likely that John has in mind the perverse claims of false teachers. On the one hand some were claiming that their supposed advancement had made them perfect, 1. 10. Others were maintaining that sin did not matter, because it could not harm the 'enlightened'. In view of this latter position, John asserts

the utter incompatibility of sin in the Christian. It should be borne in mind that the preceding context is that of future absolute, and present progressive, conformity to the Son of God, vv. 2, 3. Our behaviour reveals whose family we belong to!

	Verses 4-7	Verses 8-10
Introductory phrase	<i>Whoever commits sin , v. 4</i>	<i>He who sins, v. 7</i>
The (1) nature, and (2) origin, of sin	<i>Sin is lawlessness, v. 4</i>	Devil is the origin of sin, v. 8
Purpose of Christ's manifestation	<i>He was manifested to take away our sins, v. 5</i>	<i>That He might destroy the works of the devil.</i>
Abiding	<i>Whoever abides in Him, v. 6</i>	<i>His [God's] seed remains [abides] in him, v. 9</i>
Logical conclusion	<i>Whoever abides in Him does not sin, v. 6</i>	<i>Whoever has been born of God does not sin, v. 9</i>
Summarizing verse	<i>He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous, v. 7b</i>	<i>Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, v. 10</i>

v. 4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. To commit sin (lit. 'do sin', 3. 8, 9) is the direct opposite of verse 3. John starkly exposes the nature of sin: **sin is lawlessness**. Lawlessness (Gk. *anomia*) might even be rendered 'rebellion', or 'defiance'. Gnostic opponents⁷ claimed that their enlightenment put them at a level above the demands of the moral law, hence *anomia*, disregard of law, rebellion. Thus, the first compelling reason why sin is incompatible with Christianity stems from the *defiant nature of sin*. The second reason arises from the *mission of Christ*, not simply His death (central as that was), but His entire mission.

v. 5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, 'manifestation' clearly implies Christ's eternal pre-existence, 1. 1. The purpose of the mission of the Son of God was to take away sins, John 1. 29. This implies *bearing sins*, 1 Pet. 2. 24, and in so doing, their complete removal, Heb. 9. 26. How can any professing Christian be casual about sins when their removal required the incarnation and death of none other than the Son of God?

and in Him there is no sin. The original word order puts the emphasis on 'in Him', and the present tense is to be noted. There never was, and never will be, sin in Him, compare 2 Cor. 5. 21; 1 Pet. 2. 22. Further, and significantly, He is the One to whom we are to be conformed, 3. 2.

v. 6 Whoever abides in Him: This statement picks up the 'in Him' from the previous verse. The privilege of the believer is to abide in communion with One in whom there is no sin, 2. 28. **Does not sin** (Gk. *hamartanei*): 'no one who abides in him keeps on sinning' ESV. The present tense has a *continuous* force, notably in contrast to the tense used in chapter 2 verse 1 to imply the possibility of *isolated sin*.⁸ John writes against the background of opponents' false claims that sin did not matter because it could not harm the 'enlightened' ones, and asserts the utter incompatibility of sin in the Christian.

Not only has the habitual sinner failed to 'abide', the diagnosis is much more radical and serious: **Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him**. In contrast to literal sight, 3. 2, to 'see' Him in this sense is to be *spiritually conscious* of His presence, John 16. 16b; to 'know' Him is to appreciate His character and relationship to us, John 17. 25.

v. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Again, John issues a loving, earnest, and urgent appeal, compare Gal. 4. 19. The implication is that deceivers are active, with their high sounding claims and speculative theology. The ordinary believer must be on his guard.

He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He (Christ) is righteous. 'To do righteousness' is a familiar expression of John's, see 2. 29; 3. 7, 10. The deceptive reasonings of those in error probably suggested that one could be 'right' before God without being particularly concerned about right conduct. John will have none of it! 'Doing is the test of Being' (LAW), and Christ is the perfect embodiment of righteousness.

v. 8 He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. To 'do sin' is not the isolated act, but the ongoing pattern of an unbeliever's life, 3. 4, 9. In the great moral battle, there is no third option as regards our allegiance, 5. 19. The devil has been a consistent and habitual sinner from the beginning (of sin, the devil's fall), John 8. 44. Those who behave like him reveal their allegiance.

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Balancing the teaching of verse 5, another vital truth is put forward.⁹ The entire mission of the Son of God is to unloose, dissolve, undo the works of the devil. These 'works' refer to the vast set of strategies and activities designed by Satan to ensnare and enslave human beings, thus diverting their allegiance from the proper worship of God to himself.¹⁰

v. 9 Whoever has been born of God does not sin, John finally appeals to the divine origin of the believer's life, **born of God**. Such a one 'does not practise sin', JND. Again, it is not the isolated act of sin which is envisaged, but the settled habit of it.¹¹ Why is this so? The answer is: **for His (God's) seed remains** (lit. abides) **in him**. The idea is taken from human reproduction. Our inherited characteristics derive from a father's seed (Gk. *sperma*), and this genetic stamp cannot be undone; it is fundamental to who we are.¹²

and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God. Render 'he cannot keep on sinning' ESV. The verb 'to sin' is in the present tense, and does not mean 'cannot commit a sin' which would conflict with 1. 8-10; rather 'is not able to sin habitually'.

v. 10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, In summary, crystal clear lines of distinction are drawn by John. There is no middle ground, no alternative morality, or third way, irrespective of what sophisticated teachers may suggest. As our Lord taught, 'You will know them by their fruits', Matt. 7. 16-20.

As we leave this vitally important and deeply challenging passage,¹³ John's teaching that a believer does not habitually sin must *not* be taken to excuse occasional

forays into sin, provided one does not stay there.¹⁴ Such a suggestion would be diametrically opposed to the whole purpose of the section.

The Character of God's Children: Test – Love for the Children of God, 3.10b - 24

Verse 10 is an example of a 'hinge' verse marking a subtle transition to a new focus. In this section, the manifestation of the character of God's true child is that he loves the other members of the divine family – a social test. Sadly, love is one of the most devalued virtues in the world today. But here John speaks of *divine love* demonstrated to its utmost degree in the sacrifice of Christ. For the believer, love is not a matter of getting along well with certain favourites, but a holy determination to love all of God's dear children *because they belong to Him*. On the other hand, John unmasks the character of the world, not now as a seductive power, but in its *alienation from God* and settled *hostility* to the Christian. The section can be considered as follows:

1. Love distinguishes the children of God, vv. 11-12;
2. Love is the evidence of being truly born again, vv. 13-15;
3. Love has a sense of obligation, vv. 16-18;
4. Love can be a source of confidence before God, vv. 19-22;
5. Love will produce obedience, vv. 23, 24.

v. 10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother. The first half of this verse has been considered in the previous section. How we relate to our fellow-believers constitutes a vital social test of our profession. It is very likely that the apostle's opponents despised those who were outside their circle. 'Brother', is clearly the characteristic term for believers in this section, implying *mutual love* in a way that 'child' does not, vv. 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18.

v. 11 For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. These words recall the teaching of chapter 2 verse 7, a precise structural correspondence with Cycle 1's social test of walking in the light – *Love for the children of God* (see 'Structure - 1 John', in the 'Introduction'). **You** points to the converts and **from the beginning** refers to their earliest Christian instruction, 2. 7. John and his associates faithfully communicated the Lord's *commandment* for His church, John 13. 34. In a contentious age, marked by sad divisions among God's people, how we need to grasp this imperative with fresh power!

v. 12 not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. There is another family – those of the world – frequently marked by hatred, bitterness, and even murder. Note carefully that Cain was not an atheist, but may well have been respectable, and religious in his way. Yet, when Abel's sacrifice was accepted by God, he was consumed with envy, and his devilish, and murderous character was revealed, Gen. 4. 4-8. **And why did he murder him?** John's question indicates shock and surprise, pointing to Cain's *causeless* hatred, compare Ps. 69. 4; John 15. 25.¹⁵ **Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.** The man who presumed to worship God in his self-styled way hated, to the point of murder, the godly man who through faith knew the joy of acceptance with God, Heb. 11. 4. As in

the previous section, the focus is on the whole pattern of life. It was not simply that Abel correctly offered a blood sacrifice; Abel was already a believer whose works were **righteous**. Conversely, Cain's works were **evil**, albeit under the guise of religion.

v. 13 Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates¹⁶ you. John is not seeking to promote a 'siege mentality' in his readers with the expectation that every person they meet will hate and oppose them! After all, we are sent into the world as part of Christ's ongoing mission, John 17. 18. Rather, he is teaching that the world as a *system* is invariably hostile toward the child of God.¹⁷ This is normal Christian experience. In view of the world's hostility the following thought supplies welcome consolation:

v. 14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. How is this a sure indicator of spiritual life? Because the *nature of the life of God* in the believer is to *love*. Eternal life promotes love, and *vice versa*. Literally, 'we have passed over out of death into life', compare John 5. 24. The believer has crossed over from one sphere (death) to a radically new one (life). Observe that John's focus is love of the *brethren* – those identified by Christ as 'doers of the will of God', Mark 3. 34, 35. It may well be that the more our brothers get to know us, and we get acquainted with them, the harder it will be to love. However, this kind of love is made possible only by the new birth. **He who does not love his brother abides in death.** Absence of love indicates the darkness of one remaining in spiritual death; no saving transition has been made. Love is to life as hate is to death.

v. 15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. Hatred destroys people spiritually, emotionally, and even physically. It is essentially the spirit of the killer: our Lord traced the source of murder to uncontrolled anger, Matt. 5. 21, 22. To persistently harbour a spirit of bitter hatred towards a brother or sister is utterly incompatible with the claim to possess the life of the God of love.

v. 16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. We see here the mark of true love, and we have an obligation, vv. 16-18. For us, the concept of love (Gk. *agape*) has been completely redefined by the Lord's own sacrificial love in that **He laid down His life for us**. His unique Calvary sacrifice stands complete, historic, and endlessly inspirational.

And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. We are *duty bound* to lay down our lives for the brothers, i.e., we must follow Christ sacrificially in our love and service.

v. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? The apostle now provides a contrast by way of a concrete domestic example. A brother has this world's goods (lit. 'the means of life', Gk. *bios*) and *beholds*, RV, his brother in need, that is, not just a passing glance, but consciously shuts up (lit. turns the key, locks) his heart. Presumably, the concern is the cost involved, cp. Luke 10. 31, 32. The ongoing heartlessness of the rich man towards Lazarus' suffering provides a pertinent illustration, Luke 16. 20, 21. No wonder we read the indignant question: **how does the love of God abide in him?**

v. 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. 'Love in word' may be genuine, but lacking the necessary conviction to carry it into action, and 'actions speak louder than words'. It is possible, of course, to have deeds without love, 1 Cor. 13. 3, but, like James, Jas. 2. 15, 16, John highlights the contrast in vigorous comparative terms. If I cannot share even *the basic means of life*, how can I contemplate the greater obligation of *laying down my life* for the brothers, v. 16?

v. 19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. The thought of assurance leads to confidence in prayer, vv. 19-22; the root of the assurance looks back to v. 14. Throughout the letter the apostle shows pastoral wisdom and sensitivity. He senses the doubts that invade even the minds of the godly. One of the things that can reassure the believer is evidence of devoted service to the saints for the Lord's sake. It becomes a reason for confidence before God, Acts 24. 16.

v. 20 For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. This sentence is to be read as an *encouragement*, not a threat. Just as Peter found comfort in the fact that Christ knows all things, John 21. 17, God is greater, that is, He is a better Judge than our heart. Unlike us, He has a complete perspective – perfect knowledge of us and all the relevant circumstances.

v. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. Doubts and anxieties can hinder us in our walk and affect our prayer life. Confidence is the same word as in chapter 2 verse 28, but here relating to *present* experience. It means boldness, freedom of speaking, but always with due awe of God, Heb. 10. 19.

v. 22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. In such a relationship with God we will be asking 'according to His will', 5. 14. As the psalmist could say, 'Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart', Ps. 37. 4; see also John 9. 31. We *receive* (present tense) – the request is given, Matt. 7. 7, 8; however, in the wisdom of God's purpose we may not see the answer immediately. To 'keep' His commandments is to be on watch to obey and fulfill, i.e., active obedience. To **do those things that are pleasing in His sight** was Christ's constant joy, and significantly is linked to communion with the Father, John 8. 29.

v. 23 And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Believing and living, doctrine and practice here go hand in hand. 'The Father's commandment is the commandment of faith and love' (BRUCE). The aorist tense of the verb 'believe' points to the faith exercised at conversion, that, in turn, leads to the life of faith. But the life of faith is also the life of *love*, 2. 7, 8; John 13. 34; 15. 12.

v. 24 Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. Mutual abiding is the strongest expression of vital spiritual union with God and Christ, 4. 13, 16; John 6. 56; 15. 4, 5. This is not mysticism, but rather is objectively associated with keeping **His commandments**. Jesus said, 'If anyone loves Me, he will

keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him', John 14. 23.

And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. It is by the Holy Spirit that God sublimely indwells the believer. As Paul put it, 'The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God', Rom. 8. 16. This is the first explicit mention of the Holy Spirit in the letter,¹⁸ and forms a link to the next paragraph which will focus on testing the *spirits* to distinguish the true from the false.

Two Contrasting Brotherhoods

Brotherhood	Believers	The world
Father	<i>God</i>	<i>devil</i>
Under authority of	<i>Son of God</i>	<i>antichrist</i>
Animated by	<i>Spirit of God</i>	<i>spirits of falsehood</i>
State	<i>life</i>	<i>death</i>
Practice	<i>righteousness</i>	<i>sin</i>
Attitude to believers	<i>love</i>	<i>hate</i>
Spiritual habitat	<i>light</i>	<i>darkness</i>

Endnotes

- 1 The letter ends with an abrupt warning about idols ('false gods', *New English Bible*), thus completing a Trinitarian pattern.
- 2 Pss. 11. 7; 129. 4; 145. 17.
- 3 Rom. 11. 33-36; Eph. 3. 20-21.
- 4 See discussion in B. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Stuttgart, United Bible Societies, 1975, pgs. 710-711.
- 5 John 1. 11; 16. 3; 1 Cor. 2. 8. The leaders of religion maintained that He could not possibly be the Messiah given (among other things) His association with the needy and the outcasts, Luke 7. 34, 39.
- 6 'If progressive assimilation to the likeness of their Lord results from their present beholding Him through a glass darkly, to behold Him face to face, "to see Him even as He is", will result in their being perfectly like Him', F. F. BRUCE.
- 7 See 'Introduction' on heresies.
- 8 In 1 John 2. 1 the Greek aorist tense is used to mark an isolated event, in contrast to the significant use of the present tense in chapter 3. The latter has *continuous* force denoting habitual behaviour, a pattern of life.
- 9 For 'destroy', see John 2. 19; 5. 18; 7. 23; 10. 35.
- 10 'The works of the devil are represented as having a certain consistency and coherence. They show a kind of solid front. Christ has undone the seeming bonds by which they were held together', B. F. WESTCOTT.
- 11 Indicated by the verb *poiein*, to do or to practise which is used of 'doing' sin in verses 4a, 8 and 9, of 'doing' lawlessness in verse 4b, and of 'doing' righteousness in 2. 29, 3. 7, 10a, J. R. W. STOTT.
- 12 The RSV renders helpfully: 'God's *nature* abides in him'. Through the new birth, the believer is a 'partaker of the divine nature', 2 Pet. 1. 4; from this perspective, to practice sin would be completely *unnatural* for the believer.
- 13 Students of 1 John recognize this as one of the most controversial passages in the Epistle. It is not possible within the limitations of this introductory exposition to spell out the variant interpretations, and justify the view adopted here which is substantially supported by BRUCE, MORRIS, HIEBERT, VINE, STOTT, to name but a few. A helpful and balanced summary of the different approaches can be found in STOTT, pgs. 134-140.
- 14 ORR, R. W., 'The Letters of John' in *New International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. F. BRUCE, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979, pg. 1579.
- 15 Joseph and David provide further examples of innocent suffering, Gen. 37. 8; 1 Sam. 24. 16, 17.
- 16 The verb is in the present tense and indicative mood, not subjunctive. The point is that there is no uncertainty: the world *does* hate the godly, 2 Tim. 3. 12.
- 17 The reason for this was seen in the Master's own experience, 'The world . . . hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil', John 7. 7. He said, with reference to His people, 'The world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world', John 17. 14.
- 18 Although the 'Anointing' is referred to in chapter 2 verses 20, 27.



AUGHRIM GOSPEL HALL

COUNTY LONDONDERRY, NORTHERN IRELAND

Situated in South Derry, at the heart of the Mid-Ulster countryside mid way between Castledawson and Magherafelt, Aughrim Gospel Hall has stood as a beacon of Christianity for a hundred years.

In 1903, Mr. Robert McCrory held a series of gospel meetings in a tent on land owned by Mr. Andrew Norwell on the Killyneese Road. Around this time a group of believers, including John McMaster, Harry Boyle, Edmund Davis and William George Lennox, father of the late Alfie Lennox the missionary, were meeting every Lord's Day morning to break bread in a little country cottage on the Belishill Road, outside Castledawson. A Sunday school was also carried on there at the same time.

In 1911, another series of tent meetings, conducted by J. H. McKnight and Joe Stewart, were held in a field on the Belishill Road and lasted most of that summer. One of those saved at these meetings was a young 15 year old lad called James Corbett. He went on to become a revered elder in the assembly at Aughrim until he was called home on June 24th 1967. His obituary in the Believers Magazine for July that year states, 'Saved at 15 years of age under the preaching of Messrs McKnight and Stewart and for 56 years showed growth in grace, and much of the Spirit of Christ. The assembly at Aughrim has lost a warm-hearted shepherd, friend and counsellor, and the neighbourhood has lost a living witness to the reality of salvation.'

As souls were saved in the locality, and added to the assembly, there was a need for larger premises. The first hall, constructed of corrugated tin, was built in 1912 in the corner of a field generously donated by Mr. Hutchinson. The first series of gospel meetings held in this new building, now named 'Aughrim Gospel Hall', was at the beginning of 1913. The

speakers were Messrs J. T. Dickson and Joe Stewart, and the meetings lasted eight weeks, ending on the 20th February.

An example of the character of those early believers who met at Aughrim is given by Mr. Robert Broadbent, who was a regular visitor in the 1930s. In his book 'In Search of Souls', he refers to an incident which occurred shortly after he first began to visit. 'The first time I was in Aughrim, North Ireland, I was standing crying to the Lord - to send some money. No one was near me. About fifty yards away there was a cottage, inside there was only an unemployed brother and his wife, and they had just one pound sterling in the house. The Lord said to him, so he told me, "Give the pound to this brother coming down the road". He did so. He has never been out of employment since! Brother Lennox is his name.'

The assembly continued as a testimony in the area during the next 40 to 50 years with a fairly consistent number of around forty in fellowship, and by 1970 there were around thirty-five in fellowship.

In the early 1970s, an extension was added to the hall, and the original tin structure was given an outer roughcast cladding. This building served the assembly well until a new hall was built in 2003.

Saturday 5th April 2003 was a historic day for the assembly at

Aughrim with the opening of the new hall to the glory of God. Over 450 members and guests packed the hall that day, with many travelling from England, Scotland, Shetland Islands, and all corners of Ireland.

We are thankful to the Lord that the assembly has made progress and the numbers have increased steadily since 1970. In the past 40 years we have had much spiritual help from gifted Bible teachers and evangelists from Scotland, England, and Ireland, helping in spiritual and numerical growth - at present there are approximately eighty in fellowship, comprising all ages, and representing 40 families.

Following in the footsteps of those godly men of bygone days, the present company of believers meeting at Aughrim seeks to maintain a good testimony in the local community by obeying, honouring, and glorifying the Lord after the New Testament pattern. As with those who founded the assembly, we continue to believe that the revealed and inspired word of God is a sufficient rule not only for faith but for practice, trusting by the Spirit of God to be led into all truth, and desiring to be known among men by no other name than Christians. The wide range of assembly activities include the celebration of the Lord's Supper, prayer and Bible study, preaching of the gospel, Sunday School work and children's missions, youth work, open air evangelism and tract distribution. Along with pastoral hospital visitation, and women's fellowship there is also a keen interest in missionary work.

It is good to look back and give thanks, but there is still much to be done in our needy area. Our prayer is that the Lord will add His blessing to the work that we do to the honour and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ until He comes again.





Paul returns to the theme of the 'mind' in verse 15, calling on the believers to share the same viewpoint of striving toward 'the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus', v. 14 NKJV. The scripture is eminently practical, recognizing that every believer in the assembly would not necessarily be at the same level of understanding. VINE explains, 'The suggestion he makes is unfavourable; "if they are otherwise minded than they might be," "if they think amiss, whether by differences among themselves or by erroneous ideas"; especially, "if any think they are perfect"'.¹ Another writer comments further, 'The use of the verb *phronein* [i.e., 'to think', KRK] shows that it was more than an intellectual difference; it betrayed a different outlook and affected the conduct of those whom Paul has in mind. Clearly, there were some who were teaching that it was possible to be 'perfect' in a final sense here and now'.² He was confident, however, that the Lord would bring the members of the fellowship to agreement on this vital doctrine.

Divine Heart Surgery

The Lord uses the scriptures to work on His people's hearts. Often believers rush to sort out one another with the blunt instruments of fleshly argument and barren intellectual discourse. How much better it is to patiently teach the word and let the Holy Spirit work, as Paul exhorts, 'And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth', 2 Tim. 2. 24-25. Before discussing in greater detail the false teachers who were troubling the assembly in the next section, Paul urges the saints to maintain the gains they had made in their spiritual walk, v. 16.

Follow the Leader, Positive and Negative

The apostle next turns to discuss whom the Philippians should imitate: Paul and his colleagues, or the false teachers. 'Brethren, join in following my example' NKJV, and, 'Brothers, join in imitating me' ESV both capture the thought well, v. 17. He calls on the saints to adhere to his

Philippians: The Joy and Suffering

Chapter 3 verses 15-21: RIGHT THINKING, MATURITY

example, as opposed to the flawed and pernicious walk of the errorists.

'Ensample', v. 17, is actually the word for 'type'. LOUW AND NIDA define it as 'a model of behaviour as an example to be imitated or to be avoided'.³ Additionally, imitating the apostles is a matter of obeying their teaching as well as following their example. 'Note' NKJV, is defined by VINE, *Skopeo* usually means to mark or note so as to avoid, as, e.g., in Romans 16. 17; here it means to mark with a view to following the example set'.⁴ Today, it is fashionable in some quarters to discount Paul's doctrine as chauvinistic and antiquated. But modern believers must dedicate themselves to 'the apostles' doctrine', Acts 2. 42, and practise, 20. 31, rather than to malleable contemporary fashions. Their example is divinely given to present-day saints for their edification and emulation.

Walk This Way

Paul notes the negative examples in the Philippians' world in verse 18, 'For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ'. Walking is a repetitive activity and is characteristic of one's attitude, nature, and habits; therefore, it is an example metaphor for one's lifestyle. The godly Enoch walked with the Lord in an age when humanity was turning away from the Almighty *en masse*, Gen. 5. 22, 24. A few generations later Noah was also described as one who walked with God, 6. 9. But the scriptures also reference many instances of man's evil walk, e.g., Leviticus chapter 20. verse 23; 1 Samuel chapter 8 verse 3; and Philippians chapter 3 offers one more instance in this long and insidious lineage of spiritual departure.

The apostle had frequently warned them of these aberrant teachers, for the phrase, 'I have told you often', is imperfect in the original language,

thereby indicating ongoing activity – that is, he told them repeatedly and did not cease. What is more, it is no mere intellectual problem to Paul; he tells them with tears streaming down his cheeks, v. 18. As EADIE comments,

'He wept as he thought of their lamentable end, of their folly and delusion, and of the miserable misconception they had formed of the nature and design of the gospel. He grieved that the gospel should, through them, be exposed to misrepresentation, that the world should see it associated with an unchanged and licentious life. The Lord had shed

tears over devoted Jerusalem, and His apostle, in His spirit, wept over these incorrigible reprobates, who wore the name, but were strangers to the spirit and power of Christianity'.⁵

The True Character of Heresy

Some scholars hold that the errorists were pleasure-seeking Antinomians who flouted God's holiness in the name of religion. Personally, I believe that they were the same Judaizers that are dealt with in the opening verses of the chapter. They hid their shameful behaviour behind a cloak of ritualism. Whatever their particular identity, one thing is clear, they are 'enemies of the cross of Christ', because their doctrine is concerned with establishing their self-righteous reputation in this world. The cross puts an end to the believer's former life lived for this fallen world, Gal. 6. 14. It concerns self-denial unto the glory of God, Phil. 2. 8. In contrast, their teaching puts their sensual appetites – 'whose god is their belly', v. 19 – in front and at the centre; conversely, the cross reveals the foolishness of unregenerate man and the wisdom of the Lord, who saves by grace totally apart from human merit or effort, 1 Cor. 1. 17-31. As MARTIN sums up, 'Their enmity to *the cross of Christ* is shown by their adherence to the law as an agent of salvation, thus subverting the necessity for and

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, AND THE TRANSFORMATION FROM EARTHLY TO HEAVENLY LIFE

saving significance of the sacrifice of Calvary as the only means of redemption (cf. Gal. 2:21 RSV).⁶

They 'glory in their shame' in the sense that they claimed to scrupulously follow the law, yet it revealed their shame (likely it also refers to their thinly veiled life of iniquity). IRONSIDE summarizes their

World Citizens or Other-World Citizens?

The heretics' destiny is 'destruction', v. 19 – not the cessation of being, but the ruination of being. They will go on for eternity in the lake of fire, where they will be unable to gratify even the slightest sensual impulse, Luke 16. 24-26. VINE explains the thought, 'The word *telos*, "end", here signifies, not the cessation of existence, but the issue and destiny of the course of action. It intimates the hopelessness and irretrievableness of their condition'.⁸ If not repented of, following another gospel always leads to eternal punishment and perdition.

The believer's focus is far different than these lost ones; his 'conversation', v. 20 – 'citizenship' NKJV, ESV – is in heaven. Doubtless Paul intentionally used this term which carries the thought of 'our commonwealth' to make the Philippians compare their earthly advantages with their heavenly benefits. To be a citizen of Philippi was to automatically possess the coveted Roman citizenship. Nevertheless, Christians possess far greater standing, pertaining to heaven; therefore, their eyes are fixed upward, for they 'eagerly await', v. 20 NKJV and NASB, the Lord Jesus' return. As MOULE says, 'The form of the verb implies a waiting full of attention, perseverance, and desire'.⁹ Why such anticipation? Because He will transform our 'vile body' – better rendered 'the body of our humiliation' ASV or 'the body of our humble state' NASB – into conformity with his 'glorious body', v. 21.

The thought of transforming an earthly body tainted by the effects

of the Fall into a body of glory, fit to be in the Lord's presence for eternity, might well render one incredulous. It will be nothing less than Christ's sovereign power that will accomplish this, as WUEST describes, 'The word "working" is from a Greek word meaning "power in exercise, energy," and is only used of super-human power. The word "subdue" is the translation of a Greek military term meaning "to arrange under one's authority," as a general arranges his regiments in orderly array before himself. Thus it means here, "to bring all things within His divine economy, to marshal all things under Himself"'.¹⁰ The vaunted power of Rome – or any earthly empire or might of men – can accomplish this tremendous change. Only the risen Christ wields such supreme power, and He will use it to subdue His enemies and establish an unshakeable kingdom populated with redeemed and glorified saints, Heb. 12. 22-28.

Endnotes

- 1 W.E. VINE, *Collected Writings of W. E. Vine: Philippians*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997' electronic ed. (Logos).
- 2 RALPH P. MARTIN, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987, pg. 162.
- 3 JOHANNES P. LOUW AND EUGENE ALBERT NIDA, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, Vol. 1, electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. New York: United Bible Societies, 1996, pg. 591.
- 4 VINE, see note 1.
- 5 JOHN EADIE, *A Commentary on The Greek Text of The Epistle of Paul To The Philippians*, New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1859, pg. 216.
- 6 MARTIN, pg. 165.
- 7 H. A. IRONSIDE, *Notes on the Epistle to the Philippians*. Loizeaux Brothers: Neptune, NJ, 1922, pgs. 95f.
- 8 VINE, see note 1.
- 9 H. C. G. MOULE, *Philippian Studies*, New York: Hodder & Stoughton, n.d., pg. 105.
- 10 KENNETH WUEST, *Philippians In The Greek New Testament*, electronic ed., pdf., pg. 46.

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attitude this way, 'It is all summed up in the four little words – "who mind earthly things." Despising the heavenly calling, they choose the earthly, and become indeed "dwellers upon the earth," only to be exposed to the fierce vials of the wrath of God in the day when He arises to shake terribly the earth. No wonder the apostle wept as he wrote of such, and warned them of their peril in pursuing their evil ways'.⁷



The entrance of sin into the world had many tragic consequences. One of these was the breakdown of fellowship which man had enjoyed with God in the garden. It is one of the great truths of the Bible that, in spite of sin, God still desired communion with mankind. However, sin could not be ignored. Sacrifice was required to allow access into the divine presence, and, as FREDERICK. A. TATFORD wrote, 'Sacrifice . . . quite clearly necessitated a priesthood'.

Initially, priesthood was practised in families. Men, such as Noah, Abraham and Job, offered up sacrifices. In the case of Job, there was a very definite familial dimension, as in Job chapter 1 verse 5 we read, 'Job . . . offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, "It may be that my sons have sinned"'.

In due course, God established a system of priesthood which centred upon the nation of Israel. It was the desire of God that Israel should be a nation of priests, 'and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation', Exod. 19. 6. Sadly, the nation was disobedient, it failed to keep the covenant, and it was not possible for the divine intention to be implemented.

In order that the nation may yet have dealings with God, the Levitical priesthood was established. Men were drawn from the tribe of Levi to represent the nation before God in priestly capacity. Initially, Moses and Aaron were chosen and then, from the sons of Aaron, priests were consecrated from generation to generation. Thus, the Aaronic priesthood was in place until the time of our Lord's sojourn on earth. Zacharias was one such priest at that time, Luke 1. 5.

Many principles can be learned from the Levitical priesthood, which stand us in good stead when considering priesthood in the present dispensation. Among the lessons we learn are the vital necessity for holiness and its closely associated truth of consecration, love, obedience (contrast Nadab and Abihu, Lev. 10. 1-2), and reverence. It is not without

The Priesthood all Bel

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significance that the High Priest changed from his regular garments to enter the Holy of Holies, Lev. 16. 4. May we learn this lesson in a day of increasing casualness and a move to 'dress down' as we enter the presence of divine Persons in assembly capacity! It is not to our credit that we have forgotten many of these lessons from the Levitical priesthood.

The death of Christ brought to an end the ceremonial system of priesthood connected with the nation of Israel. It is good to remember that what God desired for Israel, Exod. 19. 6, will, however, be realized in a coming day. They will be a nation of priests in the glorious millennial reign of Christ, Isa. 61. 6; 66. 21.

No longer does God deal through one nation. The middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile has been broken down, Eph. 2. 14, and God has made 'in himself of twain one new man, so making peace', Eph. 2. 15. Thus, the distinction between Jew and Gentile has been abolished and we are living in the dispensation of 'the church, which is his body', Eph. 1. 21-22, incorporating Jew and Gentile.

In this church, established on the 'day of Pentecost', Acts 2. 1, there is no longer an exclusive nation and no distinctive priesthood. **All believers are priests**, Rev. 1. 5-6, 'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father'. Peter addresses his readers as 'lively stones . . . built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ', 1 Pet. 2. 5. He further addresses them as, 'A chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him', 2. 9. Thus, we are priests individually and collectively a priesthood, being

'a spiritual house' comprising all believers of this dispensation. It is important to notice that reference is made to 'an holy priesthood' before 'a royal priesthood'. We learn from this the vital importance of ministering God-ward before ministering man-ward. All those who teach and preach should keep this principle in view. There must be exercise in worship and prayer before standing upon a platform to preach.

Over the centuries, there have been many attempts to undermine this glorious truth. A system of distinct classes in the church was very soon established, of which TATFORD writes, 'It was not long before the ministerial or clerical class who assumed this distinctive position felt it incumbent upon them also to separate themselves from secular employment, thereby virtually ignoring the injunction laid upon all Christians of a priestly consecration of the whole life. Once spiritual and secular things were separated and a closer relation to God envisaged in the former than in the latter the conclusion of separation from secular things for a privileged few was inevitable' (emphasis mine). It is not that it was or is wrong in itself to separate from secular employment to serve the Lord without that distraction. But what was and is wrong is the elevation of the few as being closer to God, and the exclusion, as a consequence, of the many from the privilege of engaging in some aspects of priestly worship or service. There have been varying degrees to which this system has been implemented in Christendom, most notably perhaps in Roman Catholicism, but we must guard against it to any degree in assembly life.

In the early assemblies it was not very long before some were saying in the words of Luke chapter 5 verse 39, 'The old is better'. Some were trying to introduce distinct classes into assemblies and, even in the first

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century, the risen Lord had to address the Ephesian assembly and say, 'But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate', Rev. 2. 6. He also addresses Pergamos and says, 'So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate', Rev. 2. 15. It is very likely that the deeds and doctrine (note the order – the reverse of the scriptural order!) of the Nicolaitans was the elevation of a distinctive class over the laity (the mass of people as distinct from those of elevated rank). And we must remember that the Lord hates such a practice. Let us not be drawn into the popular and increasingly common practice of ordained ministers or official paid pastors (as distinct from shepherds, which are vital in every assembly). We cannot defend 'any man ministry', but it has to be observed that it is about 'one man ministry' that the risen Lord expresses His hatred. The elevation of one man, or indeed a few men, is an affront to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

There are at least two further extremes which can damage our appreciation of the truth of the priesthood of all believers. Some, perhaps, view it or teach it only in respect of assembly life. Others (and this is much more common today) prefer to see it as though it has little bearing on assembly life. The former arises from an over-zealous desire to restrict the truth to assembly activity. The latter arises from an increasingly common and much more prevalent view that assembly gatherings are relatively unimportant. This can arise when we separate the concepts of our personal life from our life in the assembly. The Bible, rather, views our lives as a whole, and we should consider our personal and assembly responsibilities as being inextricably linked and not as competing ideals.

As priests we have the inestimable privilege of drawing near into the

divine presence, 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus . . . let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water', Heb. 10. 19, 22. This confidence to enter is available to all believers, at all times, and at any time. However, we must note the conditions which are required for this access!

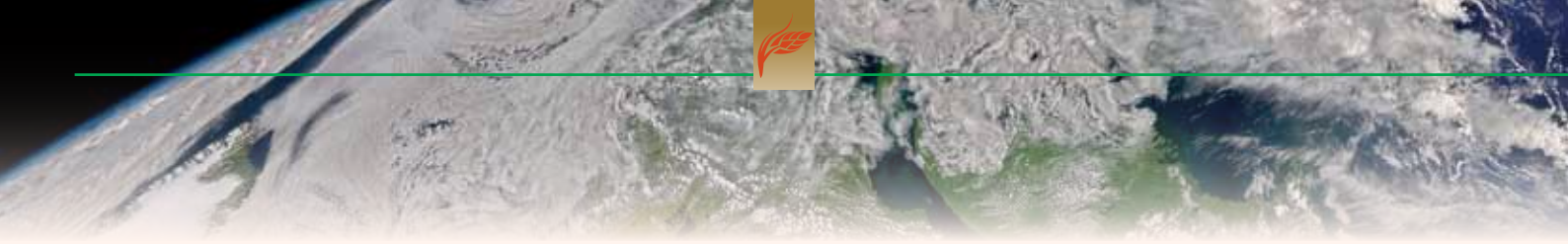
In the divine presence, we have the opportunity to worship and praise our God in prayer. 'By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name', 13. 15. How it delights the heart of God to hear His people extol the attributes, virtues, and work of divine Persons. It should be our exercise, personally in private and corporately as assemblies, to give a prominent place to such an exercise. No doubt we can extend the priestly privilege of prayer to supplication and intercession, whereby we can express need for fellow believers as well as 'for all men', 1 Tim. 2. 1.

A further aspect of priestly activity can be seen in 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verses 12-16. The preachers of 'Christ's gospel' are presented by Paul as being 'unto God a sweet savour of Christ', v. 15. What a dignity is therefore attached to gospel preaching! It is also clear from Malachi chapter 2 verse 7 that teaching God's word is connected with priestly men. May we, therefore, be freshly challenged by the honour as well as the responsibility which is conferred upon all who handle the Holy Scriptures!

How lovely to observe the high and lofty character attached to the sending of a gift in Philippians chapter 4 verse 18. It is described in terms of 'an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God'; a priestly act indeed. From the example of our Lord, we can see that other priestly activities include sympathy, recovery and bearing burdens. May we have fresh desires to be marked by priestly activity in every area of our lives!

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By the sovereignty of God we mean His purposeful, active control of absolutely everything, as Paul speaks of 'him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will', Eph. 1. 11. This includes His command and control of the billions of galaxies with their billions of stars, but also the daily movements of every one of His children. God is in control of the affairs of nations over millennia, but also the details of the brief lives of all believers.

Early examples of this in the lives of His saints are Jacob and Joseph. Jacob was a liar of the first order; yet, since he was the chosen one, all the events of his life worked out to the glory of God according to His purpose for him so that it can be finally said, 'By faith Jacob, when he was a dying . . . worshipped', Heb. 11. 21. Joseph so beautifully understands and explains to his brothers that though they were responsible for evil intent towards him, God was actually controlling it all for a good purpose, Gen. 50. 20. Incidentally, as is always the case, the sovereignty of God does not reduce in any way the responsibility of men for all they do.

One of the greatest statements of the truth of God's control of the lives of His people, and indeed of all, is given by the godly Hannah, 1 Sam. 2. 1-10. She knew that the Lord had overruled in the matter of her barrenness and the birth of Samuel, 'so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble'. But she went much further, 'The Lord killeth, and maketh alive' – thus she declared that the time and method of death is of the Lord, as well as the moment and power of resurrection.

THE SOVEREIGNTY REGARDING INDIVIDUALS

'The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up' – thus announcing that God is sovereign over our lives economically and socially. He is in charge of arranging opportunities and dispensing abilities. 'He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory' – and, yes, supremely He is the God of electing grace and has chosen His saints 'to salvation', 2 Thess. 2. 13. Daily preservation is also His doing, for, says Hannah, 'He will keep the feet of his saints'. And the psalmist knew just how intimate was God's interest in his daily life for, 'Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off', Ps. 139. 2.

God's control of the big things amazes us, but so also must that of the small. Think of the man who 'drew his bow at a venture', 1 Kgs. 22. 34, and all that had to be perfectly arranged to 'coincide' so that the arrow found its mark to take out a wicked king whose time on earth had run out! God controlled the angle of the man's arm upwards, the direction he pointed it in, the distance he pulled it back by, not to mention the exact position of the king himself, so that the arrow just got through the gap in the armour to fatally wound. Awesome!

Doubtless one of the greatest areas of concern for believers in this life is the

issue of their suffering. But this is one area which the scripture testifies is down to God's command and control.

The classic example is surely that of Job, who never mentions the Sabeans or Chaldeans, or fire, or wind, or even Satan, but ascribes his difficulties entirely to God, 'Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not

receive evil?' Job 2. 10; 'The arrows of the Almighty are within me . . . the terrors of God do set themselves in array against me', Job 6. 4; 'Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me', Job 19. 21. The Lord will affirm at the end of the book that which Job had said about Him was true. Supremely, this was recognized by the Lord, 'Thou hast brought me into the dust of death', Ps. 22. 15. Our God is the God of the good days and also of the bad, the God of the valleys as well as the mountains.

God's sovereignty is, of course, paramount in the service of His people. The oft-quoted verse, 'I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase', 1 Cor. 3. 6, embraces the work of the gospel and the growth in grace in the life of those saved, and God is essential for both. In both the choice and movement of His servants, He is in control. So we pray to the Lord of the harvest to send labourers, and a labourer like Phillip is taken from a fruitful area of service to see one soul saved elsewhere.

By
STEPHEN ARBUTHNOT
Glasgow,
Scotland





Y OF GOD VIDUALS

In the local assembly, all the needs are met by those to whom God grants the appropriate enablements, and, thus, even in a place like Corinth, they came 'behind in no gift', 1 Cor. 1. 7. Our responsibility is to stir up the God-given gift, 2 Tim. 1. 6, and to make sure there's room for all the God-given gift to be exercised. God has put each of us in the local assembly to perform the function of His choosing, 1 Cor. 12. 18.

That God's sovereignty reaches to the details of the individual's life in the world is stated very clearly by Paul when he writes, 'Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has called him', 1 Cor. 7. 17 ESV. This remarkable verse shows that our position in life, socially and economically, is determined by God. Where we were born, when we were born, the 'life chances' that would be ours, all come from God. We are to act responsibly and in God's fear within the framework which He ordains for us. We never chose to be sinners; neither did we choose our parents, our country or decade of birth! The key aspects of both our nature and that which nurtures us is not of ourselves but of God's sovereign disposing.

The acceptance of this truth should lead the believer into a life of happy submission to God's will. For the child of God there can be no accidents but only incidents which He controls. There should be no grumbling, for

if we complain of our lot it is really against our Lord that we do. No envy or jealousy should be in our hearts, for if others have more or better than us it is God who has given it them and kept it from us. No bitterness should rancour in our spirit, for all we are and have is of His wisdom and love. No turn of affairs should be a disappointment to us for everything is of His appointment for us. If there be that which truly hurts us, like Paul's 'thorn in the flesh', 2 Cor. 12. 7, let us seek the grace which God says is 'sufficient' for us in those circumstances.

One of the wonderful things about God is that He takes full responsibility for everything He does, whether big or small. About people who are physically disadvantaged, He says to Moses, 'Who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the Lord?' Exod. 4. 11. He is the great God who 'maketh the storm a calm', Ps. 107. 29, but who has, in the first place, whipped up the storm, v. 25! When we do suffer grief, let us remember that 'though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies', Lam. 3. 32.

So, let us rejoice in the life that the Lord in His sovereignty has given us to live out. Do not seek that which belongs to someone else. Let us bow to the role that God has given us on this earth and relish it and magnify Him through manifesting in it the beauties of the Saviour, 'For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure', Phil. 2. 13.

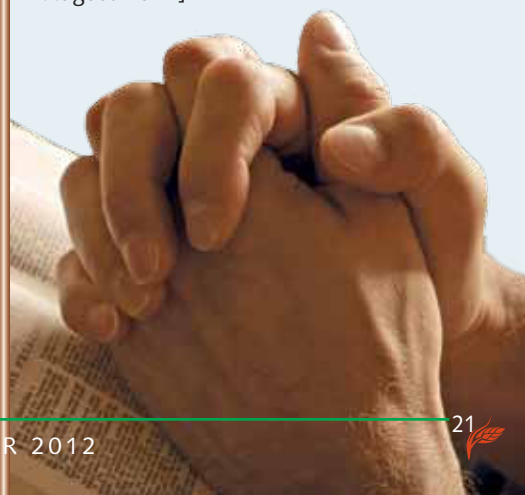
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Clasped Hands

'For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee', Isa. 41. 13.

There is always something touching about seeing humans holding hands. Whether it is a wife at the bedside holding onto her husband's hand in the last stages of life, a father holding onto the hand of his young child, or a newly married couple holding hands having taken their wedding vows; all these examples evoke emotion. This verse is saying, however, that our Majestic God holds our hand. He then whispers 'Fear not; I will help you'. This beautiful image of our hand clasped in the hand of God emphasizes the tenderness and confidence we gain from His hands. The blind man in Mark chapter 8 would have had many people take him by the hand, and at times no doubt he would lack confidence and stumble, but on one occasion he felt the hand of God. It was Christ Himself that took him by the hand and walked him out of the town. We feel sure he never stumbled that day! He would never have experienced such confidence. Are we not all able to think of moments when we have experienced the very hand of Christ clasped in our own? Like the blind man, we often do not know where we are going but we do know that He is with us and cares for us.

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Throughout the New Testament there are four major themes to the preaching of the apostles:

- The problem of sin, Acts 13. 38; 1 Cor. 15. 1-3;
- The Person of Christ, Acts 5. 42; 17. 18;
- The provision of God, 1 Cor. 1. 23; 15. 1-3; Acts 17. 18;
- The promise for believers, Eph. 2. 17; Col. 1. 5, 23.

The Problem of Sin

Sin originated with Satan and began on earth with man when Satan tempted Eve.¹ Adam and Eve sinned because they disobeyed God and rebelled against His commandment. Adam and Eve became sinners by sinning. We have sinned because we are sinners. Adam's fallen nature has passed to all mankind, so that all are born in sin.²

There are many words the Bible employs to describe the terrible nature of sin. Some of the principal words are:

- *hamartia* – the general term for sin, meaning 'to miss the mark'. Used of **Adam** in Romans chapter 5 verse 12.
- *parakoe* – failing to hear when God speaks, or hearing carelessly and inattentively. Used of **Adam** in Romans chapter 5 verse 19.
- *parabasis* – transgression, the breaking of a recognised limit or boundary. Used of **Adam** in Romans chapter 5 verse 14 and **Eve** in 1 Timothy chapter 2 verse 14.
- *paraptoma* – a false step, a mistake in judgement, an unintentional error, being caught off guard (in relation to the 'works of the flesh', Gal. 6. 1), a 'falling beside' rather than 'falling short' (*hamartia*). Used of **Adam** in Romans chapter 5 verses 15-20.
- *anomia* – lawlessness, a violation of the law of God which is written on our hearts, Rom. 2. 14-15.

The revelation of the righteousness of God is written on the hearts of all.³ As such, it can be most helpful to challenge the lost in relation to the Ten Commandments. The law causes sin to spring alive and appear greater in our lives.⁴ Our lives should be lived for the glory of God, our Creator.

WE PREACH C

Anything short of this is sin. There can be no doubt, none can reach this standard. All have sinned.⁵

Our sins have consequences. Every sin is rebellion against God and His revealed standard, Ps. 51. 4. God had told Adam that the day he broke His commandment he would die, literally 'in dying thou shalt die'. So, when Adam sinned he died spiritually, i.e., he was cast out of God's presence. Later he died physically.⁶ We are all spiritually dead and therefore will die physically.⁷

Sin produces three things: guilt, defilement, and separation.⁸ To die physically without knowing sins forgiven is to remain in this state for eternity.

After death comes judgement. Those that are lost will be resurrected to the Great White Throne where their lives will be judged.⁹ God will review their actions, their words, and their thoughts.¹⁰ The final verdict will be given and the lost will face eternity separated from the God of light, love and life, forever confronted by their own filthiness.¹¹ Hell is *awaiting sentence*, the Great White Throne is *passing sentence* and the Lake of Fire is the *death sentence*.

The Person of Christ

The apostles preached Jesus Christ (the Man down here who was once in heaven) and Christ Jesus (the Man who is in heaven and was once down here). They preached concerning His life, glory, majesty and unsearchable riches.

By

**DANIEL
RUDGE**
Bracknell,
England

To deal with the problem of our sin, Christ must be both God and Man. Only as God is He capable of paying the full penalty for sin and satisfying the righteous demands of a holy God. Only God could defeat the mighty power of Satan as the 'stronger' Man, Luke 11. 20-21, and live a life that was perfect in action, word and thought. Christ 'did no sin', 'knew no sin' and in Him 'is no sin'.¹² He could not and cannot sin.

The virgin birth is most important in this regard. The scripture speaks of Holy Spirit conception and power protection to emphasize the fact that, although He is fully man, nothing of man's fallen nature or sin tainted Him.¹³ He is 'that holy thing which shall be born', Luke 1. 35; He is holy humanity.

Only as man is He capable of dying. Only as man can He be a 'merciful and



CHRIST

faithful' High Priest, able to 'make reconciliation' for our sins. Only as man could He be called the Son of David (heir to the throne) and the Son of Abraham (heir to the land). He will one day return to take His rightful place as King of kings and Lord of lords.

The Provision of God

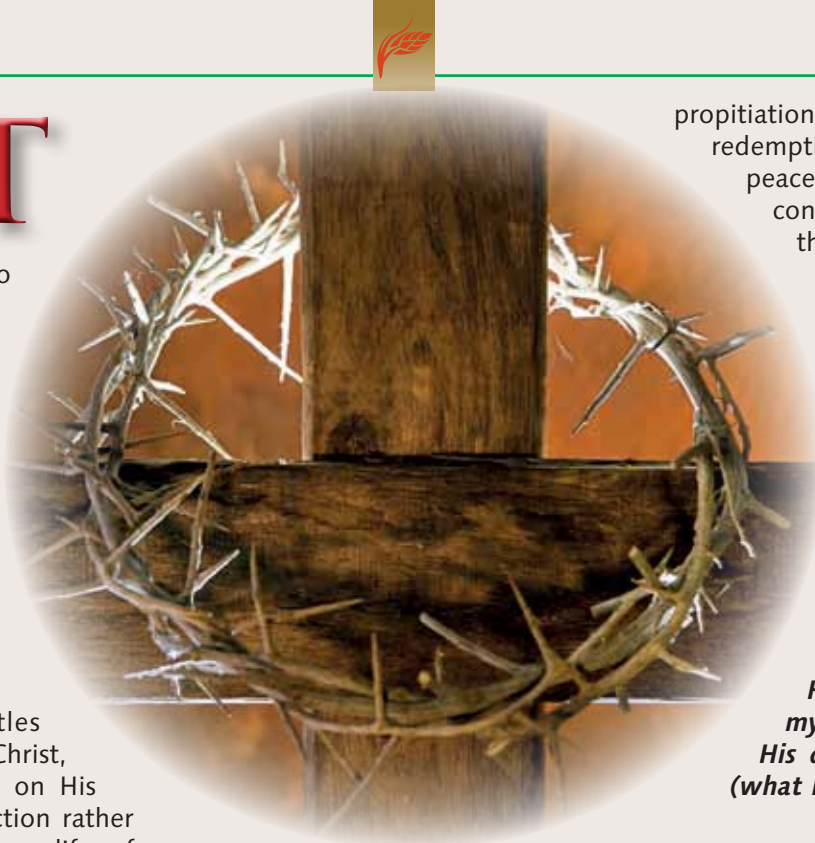
Although the apostles preached the Person of Christ, the emphasis was always on His death, cross, and resurrection rather than His life.¹⁴ The sinless life of Christ alone could not save us.

God is not just a God of love. He is also holy, righteous and just, Lev. 11. 44. For God to forgive sins, its penalty must be paid. To ignore sins or forgive them without the payment of the required penalty would be unjust. Not to punish sins would be to condone them!

The penalty of sin is death.¹⁵ Since the life of the flesh is in the blood, the shedding of **blood** speaks of death. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.¹⁶ The full penalty for sin (ransom) could be paid only by Christ,¹⁷ One who in Himself is sinless and could offer a sacrifice of infinite value and worth. He shed His precious blood¹⁸ and died. He was made sin for us.¹⁹ As a result **propitiation** has been made.²⁰ A holy God is forever satisfied and is now able to reach out to all lost sinners in grace and mercy. Salvation is freely available to ALL.²¹

We can be sure that God's justice has been satisfied because Christ rose from the dead. The **resurrection** was the seal of approval on His finished work. He has demonstrated His victory over sin, the grave and death. The resurrection also proved Christ to be the Son of God, fulfilled scripture, and secures our life and future physical resurrection.²²

A full and free salvation is now



propitiation, justification, fellowship, redemption, forgiveness of sins, peace, the purification of our consciences, an entrance into the holiest, sanctification, the establishment of a new covenant, and cleansing.³⁰

Note the distinction with His **death**. This has accomplished *my* death and release from the power of sin, the power of the law, and the present evil world, as well as my reconciliation to God.³¹

His shed blood deals with my sins (what I've done); His death deals with my sin (what I am)!

available to all, but effective only for those who believe.²³ The word of God teaches repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus.²⁴ Faith (or belief) and repentance go hand in hand. Exercising true faith in Christ must include repentance. **Repentance** is 'a change of mind or attitude' towards self, sin and God. Lost sinners must come to realize their true condition in the sight of God.

Faith is not believing something to be true. The demons believe in God and shudder with terror.²⁵ In the New Testament faith appears to have these elements: **conviction** of the truth of God's word, and **confidence** in Christ and His saving work.²⁶ This *attitude* of faith will be demonstrated in our **conduct**, 2 Cor. 5. 7. Faith does not save us; we can't boast in our faith. We are saved by grace **through** faith. It is God's grace that has saved us; faith is merely the channel by which we receive this grace.²⁷

The Promise for Believers

The moment we exercised faith in Christ we were given every spiritual blessing in Him; we are heirs with Him.²⁸ The apostles also preached the blessings that all believers share.²⁹

Many of the blessings found in Christ can also be seen in tracing what His shed blood and death have accomplished for us. His **shed blood** has paid our ransom price and accomplished:

Endnotes

- 1 Isa. 14. 12-14; Gen. 3. 1.
- 2 John 3. 6; Eph. 2. 3; Rom. 5. 12, 19; Ps. 51. 5; Job 14. 4.
- 3 Rom. 2. 15.
- 4 Rom. 7. 9; Rom. 5. 20.
- 5 Rom. 3. 23; 6. 23.
- 6 Gen. 2. 17; 3. 23-24; 5. 5.
- 7 Eph. 2. 1; Col. 2. 13.
- 8 Rom. 3. 19; Isa. 64. 6; 59. 2.
- 9 Heb. 9. 27; Rev. 20. 11-15.
- 10 Eccles. 12. 14; Matt. 12. 36; Ezek. 18. 4.
- 11 Matt. 7. 23; Rev. 20. 15; 22. 11.
- 12 2 Pet. 1. 17; 1 Pet. 2. 22; 2 Cor. 5. 21; 1 John 3. 5.
- 13 Matt. 1. 20; Luke 1. 35; Heb. 2. 14.
- 14 1 Cor. 15. 1-3; 1 Cor. 1. 23; Acts 17. 18.
- 15 Gen. 2. 16-17; Rom. 6. 23.
- 16 Lev. 17. 11; Heb. 9. 22.
- 17 Ps. 49. 6-8.
- 18 1 Pet. 1. 19.
- 19 2 Cor. 5. 21.
- 20 1 John 2. 2.
- 21 Rom. 10. 13; 1 Tim. 2. 6.
- 22 Rom. 1. 4; John 10. 18; 1 Cor. 15. 20.
- 23 Rom. 3. 22.
- 24 Acts 11. 18; 17. 30; 20. 21; 26. 19-20; and 16. 31; Rom. 5. 1.
- 25 Jas. 2. 19.
- 26 Rom. 10. 17; Gal. 2. 16, 20.
- 27 Rom. 4. 16; Eph. 2. 8-9.
- 28 Eph. 1. 3; Rom. 8. 17.
- 29 Eph. 2. 17; Col. 1. 5.
- 30 Acts 20. 28; Rom. 3. 25; 5. 9; 1 Cor. 10. 16; 1 Pet. 1. 19; Eph. 1. 7; Col. 1. 20; Heb. 9. 14; Eph. 2. 13; Heb. 10. 19; 13. 12; 13. 20; 1 John 1. 7; Rev. 1. 5.
- 31 Rom. 6. 1-11; 7. 1-6; Gal. 2. 19; 1. 4; Rom. 5. 10; Col. 1. 21-22.

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Unity is at the heart of Christianity. In the upper room, just before His suffering, the Lord Jesus laid foundational truths for the church. He taught that love for fellow believers is a proof of discipleship, 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another', John 13. 35. The apostle John confirmed this acid test for spiritual reality, 'We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren', 1 John 3. 14. Writing to churches in Galatia, Paul also emphasized our oneness in Christ despite differences in nationality, social class or gender, 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus', Gal. 3. 28.

But if Christians are expected to love each other why are churches rent by schisms? Why are there so many church denominations? Why do newly born-again believers, having sensed an immediate affinity with other Christians, soon find some saints to be irksome and that many others do not share their doctrinal beliefs? To begin with, let us remember that discord amongst God's people is not new. The Old Testament records repeated infightings within Israel, and the New Testament is littered with divisions between Christians. Early into church history 'there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews', Acts 6. 1; even the apostle Paul and Barnabas – both godly men – fell out, 'the contention [being] so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other', 15. 39.

UNITED WE DIVIDE

By **JEREMY GIBSON**
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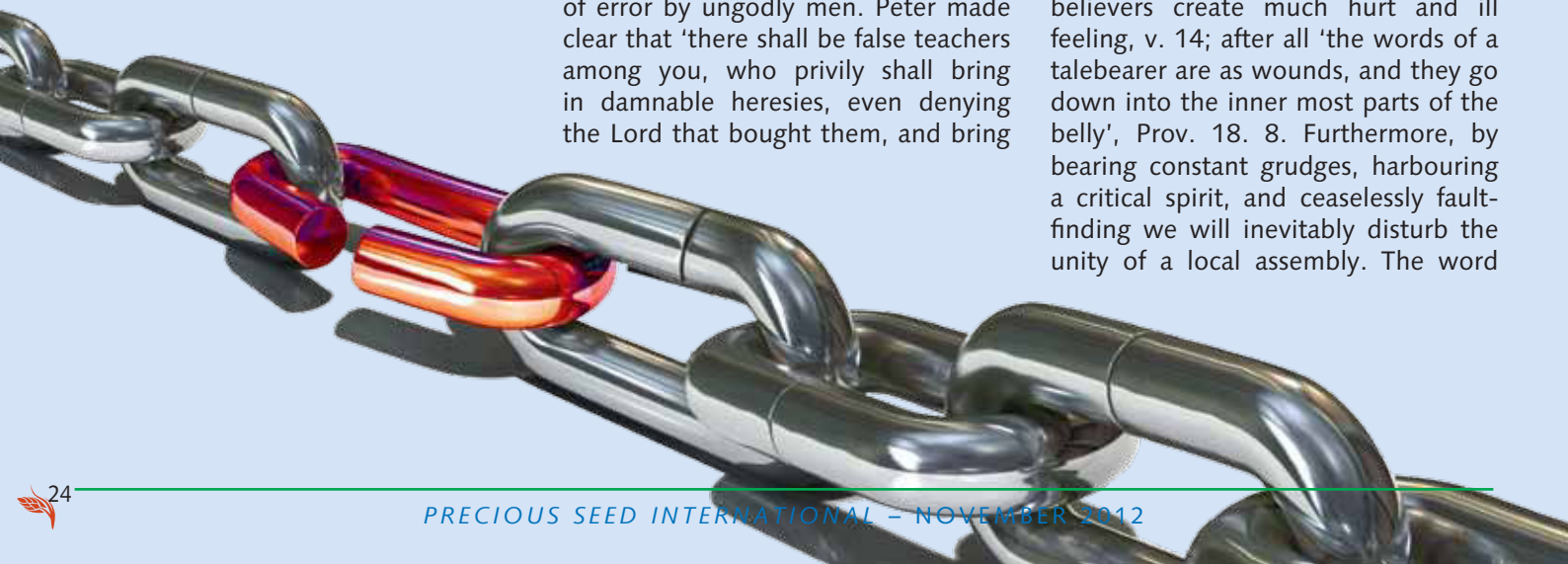
Christian disagreement has numerous causes. One of these is doctrinal variation. Never forget that the Bible, being the word of the living God, is an exceptionally complex book and our minds are intellectually limited. Add to this the retention of the flesh nature at conversion, and the ongoing propensity to sin, and it is easy to see how our capacity to fully comprehend divine truth is impaired, even though the indwelling Holy Spirit has been sent to 'guide [us] into all truth', John 16. 13. Some of these doctrinal differences have a major impact on church practice and affect who we feel free to have fellowship with. Others have enormous ramifications for our view of scripture as a whole. So, for example, should sisters wear a head covering and be silent in church gatherings? Should baptism be for believers only and that by immersion, or does the sprinkling of infants answer to the New Testament's teaching on this subject? How do we view the thorny issue of divorce and remarriage? Do we see a distinction between Israel, the nations, and the church which is the body of Christ? Is salvation down to God's eternal electing purpose or the free-will choice of human beings who are dead in trespasses and sins? Be honest. These controversies divide true believers and probably always will until the coming of the Lord, but by remembering that many of them have raged for centuries we will be more gracious when confronting the opposing camp.

A more sinister cause for splits between Christians is the deliberate propagation of error by ungodly men. Peter made clear that 'there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring

upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of', 2 Pet. 2. 1, 2. They teach error for money, v. 3. And they do it to gain a following. Paul warned the elders at Ephesus, 'Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them', Acts 20. 30.

While doctrinal error is an exceptionally serious cause for strife, sadly, the truth is that most disruptions in local churches boil down to nasty feelings and personality clashes. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians exposes some of these nasty thoughts. The letter expressed Paul's gratitude for the Philippians' generous support of his ministry, Phil. 1. 5. It also addressed disharmony within that church, 4. 2. Envy can play a big part when it comes to church rifts. 'Envy, *phthunos*', 1. 15, is 'the feeling of displeasure produced by witnessing or hearing of the advantage or prosperity of others'.¹ 'A sound heart is the life of the flesh: [But] envy [is] the rottenness of the bones', Prov. 14. 30. Unrestrained envy eventually consumes with bitterness and leads to 'strife', Phil. 1. 15. The word translated 'contention', v. 16 is *erithia*, meaning 'ambition, self-seeking, rivalry'.² Paul knew of men whose motivation for preaching the gospel was envy, an ambitious flaunting of themselves, and a deliberate attempt to 'add affliction to [Paul's] bonds', v. 16. May God preserve us from the serving out of any desire for personal 'vainglory', 2. 3.

Malicious 'murmurings' against fellow believers create much hurt and ill feeling, v. 14; after all 'the words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the inner most parts of the belly', Prov. 18. 8. Furthermore, by bearing constant grudges, harbouring a critical spirit, and ceaselessly fault-finding we will inevitably disturb the unity of a local assembly. The word



STAND ED WE FALL

translated 'disputings', Phil. 2. 14, is *dialogismos*. Referring to 'inward reasoning, an opinion',³ it described the Pharisees' harsh criticism of the Lord Jesus, 'And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, *dialogismos*, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason, *dialogismos*, ye in your hearts', Luke 5. 21, 22. Since the common denominator in all of these sins is pure selfishness, Paul wrote, 'All seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's', Phil. 2. 21.

Any attempt at unifying all professing Christians will almost certainly fail. There are too many differences. So what can we do? We can hold the truth tenaciously as we see it in the Holy Scripture, be 'valiant for the truth', Jer. 9. 3, and do our utmost to maintain unity within the local church in which God has placed us, 'endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace', Eph. 4. 3. The Philippian Epistle provides some straightforward ways to achieve this.

A local church should have a unified interest in the gospel of Jesus Christ, support missionaries financially, Phil. 1. 5; 4. 10, 14-16, work together in gospel outreach, 1. 27, and live lives consistent with the gospel message which they preach, v. 27. Linked to this is the importance of having a healthy prayer life, praying for all the saints, v. 4, and being freed from unnecessary anxieties by praying about everything, 4. 6, 7. Such a prayerful interest in each other and the gospel promotes affection between Christians and enables us to fulfil Paul's desire for the Philippians, 'If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any

fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind', 2. 1, 2 ASV.

A significant barrier to Christian unity is human pride. Thus, Paul exhorted the Philippians, 'Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves', v. 3. We can avert many splits by having a truly humble disposition. The ultimate



example of such self-humbling is the Lord Jesus, vv. 5-8. Paul showed his own humility by likening his eventual execution to a 'drink offering'. In the Old Testament, 'drink offerings' consisted of fractions of a 'hin' (about one gallon) of wine, Num. 15. 1-10, combined with other sacrifices (e.g., burnt offerings). Paul viewed his own death as merely a small drink offering poured out upon the much larger sacrifice of the Philippians' own priestly service, Phil. 2. 17. Other shining examples of people who humbly sacrificed themselves for others were Timothy, vv. 19-24, and Epaphroditus, vv. 25-30. These examples remind us that an important aspect of assembly fellowship is emulating godly, humble believers, 3. 17.

Retaining a Christ-centred focus is another useful defence against divisive thoughts. The Philippian Epistle

presents Jesus Christ as the purpose, 1. 21, the pattern, 2. 5, the prize, 3. 14, and the power for Christian living, 4. 13. Paul exhorted the Philippians to 'rejoice in the Lord', 3. 1; 4. 4. Paul himself counted 'all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death', 3. 8-10.

As well as having a strong desire to know Christ better, by looking forwards, 'forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before', v. 13, we will be preserved from resentment, from brooding over wrongs done to us, and be helped to confront believers who genuinely wrong us with a sincere desire to forgive them, Luke 17. 3, 4. Such forward thinking will also remind us that 'our citizenship is in heaven; whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ', Phil. 3. 20 ASV.

The Lord Jesus so prioritized unity amongst His people that, with Calvary looming, He prayed 'that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me', John 17. 21. May we share His desire and do all we can to foster unity within our own local assembly.

Endnotes

- 1 VINE W. E. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers), pg. 377.
- 2 *ibid*, pg. 408.
- 3 *ibid*, pg. 324.

JEREMY GIBSON is in fellowship with the assembly gathering at the Meeting Room, Curzon Street, Derby. He is a regular contributor to assembly magazines.



REPORTS REPORTS REPORTS

GOSPEL WORK AND OTHER ACTIVITIES Compiled by SANDY JACK



ENGLAND

Nottinghamshire

On June 23rd the small assembly at **Kirkby-in-Ashfield** held their second Evangelism Day assisted by Stephen Baker, (Liverpool). Twenty young people from across the East Midlands gathered with the saints at Kirkby for prayer before going out with the gospel into the streets of the town. The believers were encouraged by favourable weather which enabled them to have an open-air testimony in the town centre. The opening of a new supermarket has increased the use of the pedestrian precinct and made the witness more worthwhile. Tracts and invitations were distributed and a number of people, congregating and passing, heard the message preached. It was encouraging too that some of the younger men were able to give a short gospel message.

After a break for lunch, when there was a downpour, but the weather brightened for the afternoon which was spent tracting a number of areas within the town. About 2,000 tracts were distributed, concentrating particularly on areas of the town not normally covered.

The believers were encouraged by the continuing support of the young people, their fervency of prayer, and the faithfulness of their labours.

The first Harby Bible Study weekend took place from the 7th-9th September at the Harby Centre, near Melton Mowbray, in conjunction with the assembly at **Kirkby-in-Ashfield**. Over sixty young people attended with ministry from 1 and 2 Timothy led by Richard Collings (Caerphilly). The small assemblies at Kirkby and Grantham were encouraged by the support on the Lord's Day. The ministry and the topics discussed were a challenge to those present. It is hoped to hold a second such weekend next year, DV.

Leicestershire

The York Street assembly in **Leicester** held its annual camps activities during the month of August. Separate camps for girls and boys were held at the Harby Centre, over a two-week period. The girls' camp was one of the largest in recent years. It was led by Michael Buckeridge (Grantham), and the boys' camp by Mark Hill (Warsash). There was a good interest throughout and it is hoped that salvation may result from the seed sown on these occasions.

Manchester

The assembly at Bethesda Hall, Worsley Road, **Swinton**, were encouraged by the number of believers who attended their Missionary and Home Workers Conference, at which Stephen Baker, from Liverpool, and Saad Bassem, from Egypt, gave challenging reports. On the Sunday following the conference, a Gospel Luncheon was held, at which brother Bassem spoke. One lady present was a ninety-two-year-old, who came along as a result of an invitation posted through her letter box. The saints rejoiced with heaven as later that day, this lady repented

of her sin and took Christ as Saviour. A real change has been seen in her life, and she has started to attend the midweek Bible study and prayer meeting.

The assembly has also seen others from different religious backgrounds coming along, getting saved, and being brought into fellowship. Recently, after reading their notice board, a converted Muslim from Tanzania has started coming to the Sunday Family Service, and other meetings. The assembly are finding *Footprints for First Steps*, from Precious Seed Publications, a great help as they seek to teach new converts, and those from other backgrounds, in their Bible studies.

London

On 30th July the Olympic Torch passed by Clifton Hall, **South Norwood**. The believers took the opportunity to open the hall for a Coffee Morning, and distributed tracts to people passing by, as well as those waiting for the procession. Many tracts were distributed, and a few people came into the Hall. On September 16th the nearby main road was closed to traffic for the Thornton Heath Festival, and, again, the believers took advantage of that to distribute tracts in the afternoon. This coincided with the commencement of a two-week Bible Exhibition in the hall. The Festival was a very multi-cultural event, and again many invitations were distributed.

As a result of the exercise of a few believers, and with the help of some more, the word of God was distributed to many souls during the summer's special events in the city. The Queen's Diamond Jubilee, the Olympics, and the Paralympics all provided opportunities. Many thousands of tracts were given away each day in a variety of locations around central London. These included Greenwich, Earls Court, Lords, Wembley, Horse Guards, Green Park, Hampton Court, Hyde Park, where there was a steady stream of people going to the 'Big screens', Stratford, and West Ham, where there were large volumes of people walking to the Olympic park. Around 300,000 tracts were distributed and a number of Bibles were given away. The website, www.london-goforgold.com, has had over two hundred visitors. We trust that among the huge crowds there will be individuals who will turn to the Saviour. Generally, the police were friendly and helpful, however Olympics officials and Trading Standards officers tried to interfere on a number of occasions. Thankfully, the Lord gave help and these difficulties did eventually diminish. There were no such difficulties at either of the two open-air meetings held in Trafalgar Square. These were good times, and while many that passed were indifferent,



some stopped to listen, and a variety of discussions took place.

At Eaton Dorney, shuttle buses ran to the venue for water sports from the three train stations - Windsor and Eton Riverside, Slough, and Maidenhead. This required an early start (tracting before 7am!) and a couple of believers at each venue. Most mornings more than four thousand tracts had been given out before 9am. Some good conversations were held, and two Bibles requested by station staff were provided.

People from all over the world were given tracts to read, and it is hoped that these have now been taken back to many countries, including those where the gospel is not easily spread. From time to time it was possible to enter into conversation with those passing by. On a number of occasions this was with those who have been exposed to false teaching. In contrast, one young man said he used to read his Bible - and then added, a little sheepishly, that it was when he was in Belmarsh, a UK maximum security prison! He was encouraged to read the tract as a reminder of what he had previously learnt, and we trust that, along with many others, we were a 'link in the chain' of the Lord working in people's lives.

Plymouth

The believers at Efford Christian Fellowship, **Plymouth**, have held a coffee morning for the past six years, and around twenty people come along each week. The majority who attend are retired people who live nearby. Many are widows and widowers who are lonely, and they appreciate getting outside of their 'four walls'. As a result of this work, they also provide a monthly 'over 55's meal', where approximately fifty older people attend for lunch - giving a good opportunity to share the gospel. A number of these friends sometimes also join them for an occasional walk to a local beauty spot and, as the most do not have their own transport, an afternoon out is quite a treat for them. The Assembly minibus is used and locations chosen where a cafe is available so they can obtain a drink and snack - this gives another opportunity to sit together and talk. Some describe it as an 'amble' rather than a 'ramble', but the point of the exercise is not just to provide an activity, but to befriend people and engage them in conversation about the Lord.

Newcastle

Jim McMaster reports, 'Recently I was asked to write about "An average day in the life of Jim McMaster" but the more I tried the more I realized that there was no such thing as an "average day". As we reach out to the addicts on the streets and in the hostels the chaotic lifestyle of such people means that much of what we do is reactive and, by definition, unplanned. Crisis after crisis cast us on the Lord for grace and wisdom, and often new challenges are faced daily. However, opportunities abound to tell out the gospel, both personally and by way of public declaration in open-air meetings. During the Olympics several of the football events were held in Newcastle. We were greatly encouraged to be joined by several of the local believers in three days of special tract distribution and open-air meetings in the



city centre. Many contacts and conversations encouraged all who were involved, and thousands of tracts were distributed.

I have been greatly encouraged by the work in the prison. Not only do I continue to enjoy unrestricted freedom to the men at all times but the Bible Class has been particularly blessed by the Lord. Maybe a little example may help you understand the encouragement at the moment.

About two months ago I paid a visit to a cell looking for a street contact that had just come to prison, the intention being to recruit him to the Bible Class. After 12 years I can pretty much find my way around the prison blindfolded but, on this occasion, I missed the intended cell by one. As I entered the cell there were two men I had never met before, one in his early thirties and the other in his fifties. They were as surprised as I was and when I had explained the purpose of my visit you can imagine my surprise when both shouted, "Praise the Lord". The younger man (Leigh) is a criminal of some reputation, and we had crossed paths many times. He explained to me that two months previously he had come to jail and has decided to read the Bible. He said that one night he had understood His need and had trusted Christ as His Saviour. Immediately, he started to devour the scripture and pray, and as a result had attracted some opposition to his new-found joy. He had prayed for one month for the Lord to send someone to help him. He was transferred from one wing to another, and was praying he would be paired up with someone who would be sympathetic to his new-found faith. As he entered the new cell the man in his fifties (Jacob) was his new buddy. Immediately, Leigh saw a Bible and, before he had time to say anything, Jacob said, "Now, I am a Christian, you better get used to it, no swearing and no TV when I read my Bible". Jacob is a backslider who, as a result of a drink problem, had come to jail for driving offences. During his short time so far in the jail the Lord had taken dealings with him and he had purposed in his heart to return to the Lord and serve Him even in the jail. Leigh burst into tears when he found another Christian, and from that day to this, they have been a great encouragement to each other. Leigh is an outspoken witness, and has attracted some unkind comments even from the staff, but is fixed in his determination to witness to anyone. Both have been greatly encouraged at the Bible Class these last eight weeks. Last week, Jacob left the prison and I was able to speak with him prior to his departure. He told me that he had taken all his belongings with him, except one photograph that he had left on the wall of the cell. It was the last picture taken of him before he came to jail. He was at a wedding, and he told me that he was very drunk when the picture was taken. He explained that he was leaving the picture on the wall because he was leaving the old Jacob behind in the prison, and living a new life for the Lord Jesus. Please pray for these two men'.

Jim McMaster and friends



Last year, Graham Paterson acquired a bus, which is being used for taking the gospel to children. So far this summer **Glenmavis, Shawhead (Coatbridge), Salsburgh, Inchture and Tayport** have been visited and



response from the children has been very good. The children seem delighted to sit on the bus and hear the gospel. At Salsburgh the meetings were held in the school grounds immediately after school, and over half of the school attended.

Graham also had the joy of seeing the Lord's hand at work during camp visits in July and August in Shetland, Tayside Christian Youth Camp at Faskally, Cardy (NI) and Peterborough Camp at Chepstow. A few young people made professions of faith and some have since been baptized.



John Speirs and John McQuoid were responsible for gospel and ministry meetings at **Northfield** for two weeks in July, this year. On the final night even the 'prayer tent', used as an overflow, was completely full. Some people were sitting in their cars listening to the message. Some of those who confessed Christ have significant problems, so please pray that they may be blessed, and grow in their faith.

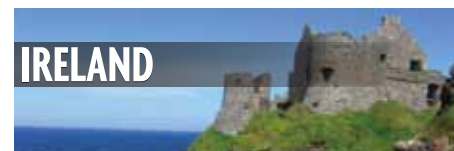
A team of young people, led by Stevie Moore and Derek Watson, had interesting conversations with people around the town, and many heard the gospel. One lady professed salvation as she talked to some team members



on the street. She came with her young child to a gospel meeting in Shimna Gospel Hall, but it was all completely new to her. Pray that she will respond to the welcome, and come back again. The children's work in two caravan parks with Colin and Rosemary Sheldon once again proved to be a time of blessing. Five little ones professed faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is encouraging to hear of a young man of 15, saved five years ago at Northfield, being baptized and coming into fellowship in a Co. Antrim assembly.



There are encouraging signs in the work in Tenby. Ian Rees has been preaching through Genesis in the community centre every Sunday. There is now a core of seventeen who come along, and about ten who are occasional visitors. Most of these are believers from denominations such as Baptist, Anglican, Methodist, and Pentecostal. None of the churches in Tenby have a Sunday evening service, so these folk go to their own churches in the morning and come to hear the word in the evening. Most of them have never experienced a systematic approach to a book of the Bible, and are thrilled to see the way things are unfolding. One lady, in her seventies, has commented that she cannot sleep at night for excitement as she sees truth opening up. This is the power of the word of God. Speaking about Sodom in chapter 19, and stressing that any physical relationship outside marriage is wrong, a lady came up to Ian afterwards wanting to 'confess' that she was living with a man to whom she was not married. The word of God has its effect! There are four or five, however, who come along who are not believers and know that. One, a Pakistani gentleman called Max, works as a kitchen assistant in one of the hotels. He was in need of a resident's visa and came across Ian one day and asked to be visited. Ian read the scriptures, and prayed with him, asking that that the visa would arrive; it did so five days later. He has not missed a Sunday evening since! He has not been permitted by his employers to take Sunday afternoon/evening off, so he forgoes his lunch break and tea break so that he can leave early. He arrives at the meeting at 6.30, and heads back to the hotel for 7.30. Pray for his salvation. Another lady, not a believer, has bought herself a Bible and comes every week without fail.



This year has been a good season at the agricultural shows, with many souls receiving gospel literature. Many have stopped and talked, and listened as the gospel was explained to them for the first time. There was also good interest from some of the neighbouring exhibitors, some of whom talked for a long time. There was cause for rejoicing, when, at the Cappamore show, Co. Limerick, a 15-year-old professed to be saved at the stand. The gospel was clearly presented by two of the brethren on the stand as 'S' and her friend listened. While her friend was not interested, 'S' kept listening, and after nearly



an hour trusted the Lord as her Saviour. Like many Catholic young people, she had been wearing a bracelet which displayed pictures of different saints and Mary, believing that by wearing it it was bringing her closer to God. Having trusted Christ, she gave that bracelet to one of the brethren, explaining she 'did not need it any more'. 'S' lives in the village of Cappamore, and as far as it is known, she is the only believer in the area. The nearest place where she can get some regular spiritual contact is Limerick, 25 minutes away. Please pray as the Christians in Limerick try to follow up the contact.

In **Newcastle West**, after seeing a notice in the newspaper, a local man, Maurice, has been attending a Christianity Explored course, much to the encouragement of the believers.

Currently, the assembly rents a local community building which is shared with other tenants and, although this has served their needs well, they believe the Lord has opened up the way for them to rent premises in the town centre where they will be the sole tenants. The premises would give the assembly a great visual presence in the town, and they believe that even doing the needful renovations there would be a testimony.

In **Gorey**, the assembly have had the great privilege of baptizing six believers at the beach. Around sixty gathered to watch.



Michael McKillen reflects, 'The spiritual and economic climate in Ireland remains troubled and, indeed, is causing a significant change in Irish culture. Continued revelations of the scandals in the Roman Catholic church have greatly weakened its grasp on society. This

is allowing more opportunity for discussion of what the Bible actually says. However, it seems to be the case that it is leading to increased secularism, agnosticism, or atheism. This may well be a crucial moment in the spiritual history of this nation. Please continue to pray'.



Egypt

As a consequence of believers refusing to join in the riots both during and since the revolution many have suffered much; in some cases their homes were looted and then torched. One brother had his shop and the stock destroyed; however, with God's help he has now started to run his business from the basement of his old shop premises. In such difficult times, our Egyptian brethren and sisters are very appreciative of our prayers.

In Assuit, the brethren are meeting for prayer every day in the new building which has now been completed but not yet equipped. One brother, a full-time commended worker, is living in the premises as a security guard until full authorization is granted for the building to open as a place for worship.

The work of rebuilding the Gospel Halls in the villages of El Nechala and Koumareeb in southern Egypt, has started. The existing buildings are over seventy years old and originally built out of mud bricks and wattle. In some areas the roofs were beginning to disintegrate and fall into the building. Until recently it was a crime to repair any Christian meeting place, but the believers are working day and night to complete the task before the newly elected government begins to rule the country under Sharia law.

A conference for young people was also held in the Red Sea area of Hurgada, at the beginning of the year. Over three hundred and forty were present from all over Egypt. They had the great joy of baptizing three believers in the Red Sea very early one morning. At present there are a keen group of believers meeting in various homes in this area and work has begun to lay the foundations of a new gospel hall.

At the annual El Zouia Gospel Conference, approximately two hundred and sixty unsaved people from the garbage tip area of Cairo were present. Forty-two made a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, and many have since been baptized. Many of these new 'living stones' have become the 'foundation stones' of the newly planted assemblies in El Zouia and Hadana.

Please remember that in this country the believers face constant opposition, threats to their own lives and those of their families, bullying of children at school, having to meet in secret desert places for fear, and being shot by fanatics from other religions. Please pray.

Botswana

The assembly in **Francistown** had the joy of receiving into fellowship a young man, James, who was saved and baptized in Serowe, but then came to Francistown in January of this year. Another young brother, Stanley, also from Serowe, has requested baptism. The

assembly meetings have been continuing well, with the Sunday School and gospel outreach every Sunday afternoon during government school term-time.

Romania

Jonathan Kelso reports, 'Starting a new school can be an exciting, yet daunting experience. Yesterday, the 17th of September, Ruth accompanied Adina, Rebekah, and Joshua to enrol for their respective classes at the local school and gradinita) in Orlat. I would have liked to have been there, but I had brought a man to hospital in Sibiu for an appointment. Things didn't go so well on their first day at school, with quite a lot of confusion regarding the previous discussions we had had with certain members of staff concerning our children coming to the school and what this would entail. Joshua's enrolment at the gradinita was more straightforward, but, for him, it is quite a leap back in time, being in a little classroom with very juvenile toys he would have played with when he was at playschool two years ago, back home. He is in a class with boys and girls his own age and seems to have a nice teacher, so we hope that this will be a good opportunity for him to make some friends and also 'springboard' him into learning the language. We were asked to come and talk with the headmaster concerning Adina and Rebekah attending the school. He was quite 'cold' and unwelcoming, which didn't do anything to ease the pressure already building up in the girls. Rebekah was put into class 5 and Adina into class 6 and their first full day at school turned out to be not so bad. The pressure is now on for the girls to learn the Romanian language as quickly as possible so as to keep up at school, and we would value prayer for this matter.'

In early September, a little baby, Anisoara Andrea, of only two-and-a-half months died in the home of a family connected with the assembly in Gura Raului. Her mother is a girl we know well, who is only eighteen years old; the baby was born prematurely and was in intensive care from the time she was born. I spoke at the night gathering in the home on Thursday, and also at the funeral on Saturday, which presented great opportunity to make clear the message of the gospel. We used our van as the hearse to bring the tiny coffin to the burial ground'.

Brazil

Following a visit to Brazil, Harry and Jean Reid report as follows: 'It was a real joy to be able to revisit the region where we spent years in the early seventies. In **Pirassununga** and **Ibate** it was delightful to see some of the Sunday school children who were saved in the early seventies, now engaged in the ministry of teaching the word, and preaching the gospel. In **Manaus**, a large city of over two million inhabitants and around 1000 miles from the mouth of the river Amazon, there is a little assembly in one of the outlying areas, **Cidade de Deus**, where Jenair and Carla have been labouring faithfully for a number of years. This is the assembly to which Noe has been added, (Reports, *PSI* August 2012). **Bom Jesus** is a locality right in the heart of the forest, some 70 miles from Manaus and to get there involves crossing two large rivers, the rivers Solimoes and Negro, then a further one hour drive into the Amazon forest. Jenair carries on a weekly visit to **Bom Jesus**, and has an opportunity to preach in two schools, reaching some 500 pupils and teachers with the gospel'.

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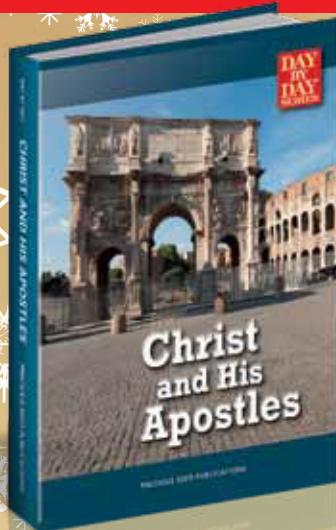
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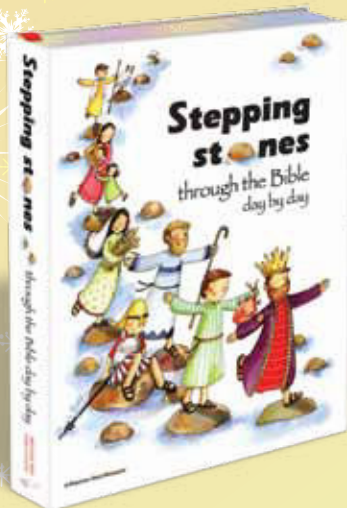
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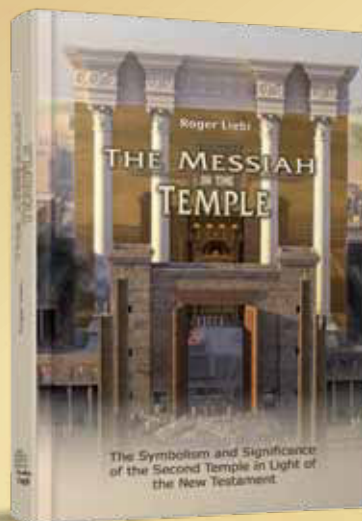
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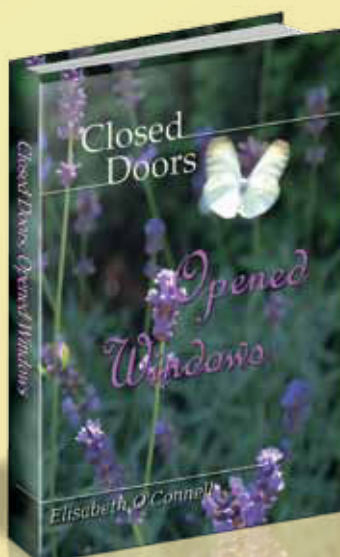


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This is a book written by a mother for mothers. Buy it for yourself or for your friends, for your women's group (special prices for ten or more copies), or, husbands – for your wife!

Who are 'the Brethren'?

What is a New Testament assembly? How did the so-called 'Brethren Movement' begin? In this article, we will review some online resources to help answer these and related questions.

Since we do not consider denominational attachments to be scriptural, 'Gospel Halls', and similar assembly buildings, cause minor headaches at the General Register Office in the UK. In some parts of the UK, in order to use a building as a legal place of worship and to perform marriages, the building has to be registered officially with the authorities. The full list of Registered Places of Worship in England and Wales as of April 2010 has been made available under the Freedom of Information Act. The 1000 page pdf is at <http://bit.ly/NHQyxE>. It is interesting to see the range of affiliations selected by assemblies: from plain 'Brethren' to 'Christian Brethren', 'Open Brethren', or, the more intimidating, but probably more accurate, 'Christians not otherwise designated'.

So much for buildings, now let us consider the people instead. In the 1980s, the Echoes of Service organization commissioned a set of articles entitled 'Who are the Brethren?' The full series is available online at http://www.believershome.com/html/who_are_the_brethren.html. Contributing authors include Bible teachers like J. Heading and F. F. Bruce. A longer and more detailed treatment of assembly truth from W. E. VINE is available at <http://awildernessvoice.com/Church&Churches.html>. He distinguishes clearly between the church as a whole (i.e., 'the church, which is his body', Eph. 1. 22-23) and a local company of believers (e.g., 'the church of God which is at Corinth', 1 Cor. 1. 2). Note that VINE's helpful book, *The Church and the Churches*, can be purchased in paperback form directly from Precious Seed Publications.

There are several interesting retrospective accounts of the beginnings of 'The Brethren Movement'. IRONSIDE's Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement covers the period from around 1820 to 1900. The entire book is online at <http://www.plymouthbrethren.org/series/6265>. The Wikipedia page http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plymouth_Brethren also has some information about the early 'Brethren', including an alphabetical list of 'notable members', from Sir Robert Anderson (one-time Head of Scotland Yard) to George Vicesimus Wigram (concordance compiler and son of an English peer). It is worth noting that an article on Wigram appears in the June 2012 Precious Seed e-magazine at http://www.preciousseed.org/pdfs/emagazine_2012_02a.pdf.

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DISTRICT	NAME	NO. ON REGISTER	ADDRESS 1	ADDRESS 2	RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY
AMBER VALLEY	121	121	121	121	121
AMBER VALLEY	122	122	122	122	122
AMBER VALLEY	123	123	123	123	123
AMBER VALLEY	124	124	124	124	124
AMBER VALLEY	125	125	125	125	125
AMBER VALLEY	126	126	126	126	126
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Views from the News

COMPILED BY SANDY JACK

Australia votes against redefining marriage

The Parliament of Australia has overwhelmingly rejected attempts to legalize gay marriage in two decisive votes. Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard, was personally opposed to redefining marriage, but she allowed her Labor party members to vote according to their conscience.

The leader of the Australian Christian Lobby, Jim Wallace, said the Parliament has now expressed a decisive view on the matter. 'Everyone has had enough of this debate', Mr. Wallace said. 'It has been one of the most vitriolic campaigns I have ever seen and it has demonised so many good people out of the public square, such as Victoria's chief psychologist Kuravilla George, who lost his job as a member of Victoria's Equal Opportunity Commission because he supported marriage'.

Supporters of gay marriage were disappointed. 'I think at some future time our parliament will catch up with community opinion, just as it has on other issues', senior government minister Anthony Albanese said after the vote. 'When marriage equality occurs, people will wonder what the fuss was about', he said.

<http://www.christian.org.uk/news/australia-votes-against-redefining-marriage/>

Elvis Bible sells for £59,000

A Bible used by Elvis Presley until his death in 1977 and containing his handwritten notes, thoughts, annotations, and underlining was bought by an American man based in the UK for £59,000 at an auction in Cheshire in September. The Bible was given to the American singer on his first Christmas in Graceland in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1957. It was used by him until his death on 16 August 1977 at the age of 42. One of the lines emphasized by the 'King of Rock and Roll' is, 'What is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul', according to UK's Press Association. The book was expected to sell for around £25,000, but went for more than double its value. 'It was a really exciting atmosphere in the room; we had three hundred people and there was bidding online and on the telephone across the world. You could hear a pin drop when it sold for that price', Karen Fairweather, sales room manager at Omega Auctions, was quoted as saying.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/elvis.bible.sells.for.59000/30623.htm>

Gloucester Council apologises to Christian group

Gloucester City Council has apologized after it stopped a Christian group from handing out Christian literature in the city centre. The group were handing out tracts in the centre of Gloucester in July. They were told by council staff that the handouts breached the city's by-laws. The group was made up of Christians from ten local churches who were distributing the tracts as part of Bible Day Gloucester. The apology was issued following the threat of legal action from the Christian Legal Centre.

Roland Parsons, spokesman for Christians in Gloucester, said, 'Christians in Gloucester believe that we have the basic freedom in Britain to hand out literature of a political or religious opinion to any other citizen in Gloucester. The city MP would not have been treated in this way if he and his colleagues were handing out political message literature at Gloucester Cross. The Bible Day this year featured the contribution of Gloucester's John Hooper to the freedom of all religions in Britain. We also refuse to live in a totalitarian regime where political and religious opinion is banned'.

<http://www.christiantoday.com/article/gloucester.council.apologises.to.christian.group/30429.htm>

Bits & Bobs



Men and Women See Differently . . . Literally

A husband and wife don't always see eye-to-eye. Sometimes, this is simply because they have differing preferences, but often it is because they are wired with differing thinking patterns. Researchers now report how brain structure differences between men and women appear to relate to vision differences.

The study results appeared in two papers in the online journal *Biology of Sex Differences*. Lead author Israel Abramov said, 'As with other senses, such as hearing and the olfactory system, there are marked sex differences in vision between men and women'.

For example, the study confirmed that women are better at distinguishing colours than men. But men, who have twenty-five per cent more neurons in the visual cortex, have more sensitivity to fine detail and rapidly moving images. Also, the two sexes recognized the same hue, but at slightly different wavelengths.

Who has not suffered an argument with the opposite gender that sounds like, 'No, that's not green—that's more like turquoise'? This research shows that what looks green to one gender may not appear identical to the other. Unless the two agree to validate the other's perception, the argument over colour might persist indefinitely!

Why are men and women different in the way they perceive the world and process and communicate information? Could nature have selected these trait differences? If so, how would these differences contribute to survival? Abramov apparently has no answers to these questions. 'The evolutionary driving force between these differences is less clear', he said.

It is 'less clear' because evolution is not remotely responsible for crafting males and females, whose similarities and differences were purposely built by God. Jesus acknowledged His creativity when He admonished a group of religious leaders, saying, 'But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female'.

When it comes to the science of the sexes, the Bible has the answer.

<http://www.icr.org/article/7063/>

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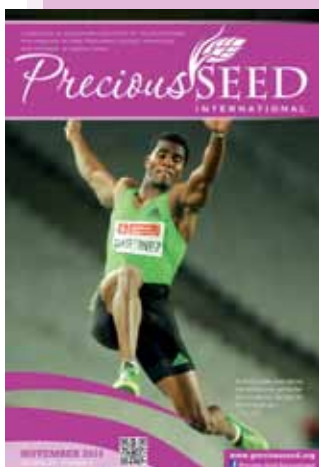
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Front Cover illustration:

The London 2012 Olympics have been an incredible spectacle of athletic ability and prowess. There were 26 different sports, 302 events, 962 medals and over 10,000 athletes all competing to be an Olympic champion. Whilst we have all been impressed by the incredible performances and world records that have been broken, sadly there have been occasions where athletes have not obeyed the rules or have cheated by taking drugs.

2nd Timothy chapter 2 verse 5 reminds us that even if the athlete wins the sporting event he is rewarded only if the rules are obeyed. So it is in every Christian life. We need to reach that finish line honourably, faithfully obeying the word of God. Disqualification brought anguish and shattered hopes in this year's Olympics. How much more are the Lords people saddened and disheartened when fellow believers are spiritually disqualified because they have not kept the faith?

This verse also talks about striving for mastery. The word strive comes from the Greek word 'athle' that is to contend in the competitive games. It is where we get the word 'athletics' from. Paul uses this language to encourage Timothy to dedicate his life as an athlete, to give everything in service for God. There really is no such thing as a half-hearted Olympic athlete and there should be no such thing as a half-hearted servant of the Lord. May we be a people marked out by honourable striving and whole-hearted service for God.



Question Time

Conducted by

RICHARD COLLINGS

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

QUESTION

**Can I use my natural skills
in the service of the Lord?**

ANSWER

Throughout the book of Acts, and in the Epistles, there are numerous examples of servants of the Lord engaging in a diversity of service for God. However, within the New Testament there are at least three sections that specifically catalogue the variety of abilities, or responsibilities, suitable for, or relevant to, divine service. Those three sections are 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Romans chapter 12, and Ephesians chapter 4. Interestingly, in each of these chapters the word 'gift' occurs, and, although the word employed by Paul in the Ephesian letter is different, the principle holds good, the things listed are spiritual in character and are given gratuitously to the recipient. Such abilities are not natural talents; they are not the product of the recipient's skill or commitment, but are divinely given.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul exhorts, 'Neglect not the gift that is in you', 4. 14. These spiritual gifts are not meant to be left dormant, nor are they given for the exclusive benefit of the one to whom they are given. They are to be utilized 'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man', Eph. 4. 12-13. There is no doubt that the more a gift is used the more it develops, and the user becomes more competent in his service for the Lord.

A closer study of the New Testament will show that some of the gifts listed in the three sections mentioned above have now ceased; they were given for a specific time, and for a specific purpose. For example, the writer to the Hebrews, in chapter 2 verses 3-4, teaches us that some gifts were given to authenticate the 'new' message of the gospel, which was first spoken by the Lord, and was continued by those that heard Him. Miraculous sign gifts accompanied their preaching, thereby showing that their message was of divine origin and not of man.

Thus far we have focussed on gifts that are spiritual in character, to highlight the point that they are different to natural skills. However, the questioner has raised the issue of 'natural talents' – can I use my natural skills in the service of the Lord? Space does not permit a full response, but the direct answer has to be, 'Yes I can'. A brother, or a sister, may be linguistically skilled, and devote that ability to translating the word of God, commentaries, or other Bible helps, into the language of people who would otherwise be deprived of such material.

Other examples of natural skill-sets being used for the furtherance of the Lord's work could easily be cited. Builders, mechanics, electricians, hymn-writers, teachers, farmers, and a host of other abilities possessed by brethren and sisters have been sacrificially yielded to God's service. The probability is that every reader of this magazine owes a debt to those currently living, or of a former generation, who have not only exercised the spiritual gifts given them but have dedicated their natural talents to the furtherance of the Lord's kingdom.

Of course, we need to be careful. Natural talent alone is insufficient to qualify a person to hold a particular place of responsibility in the service of God. A man endowed with the gift of oratory does not necessarily make a competent Bible teacher. The managing director of a company, or the chief of a village, is not automatically qualified to be an overseer in the assembly. It is quite possible that within an assembly there may be a master and a servant fellowshiping together. In the realm of employment, the servant would be subservient to his master, yet within the assembly the servant might be an elder and the master might not.

At the age of 38, just 5 years before her death, Frances Ridley Havergal penned the hymn 'Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to thee'. The last verse ends with the words 'Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for Thee'. Maybe that line succinctly answers our question.

Questions for this column should be addressed to info@preciousseed.org